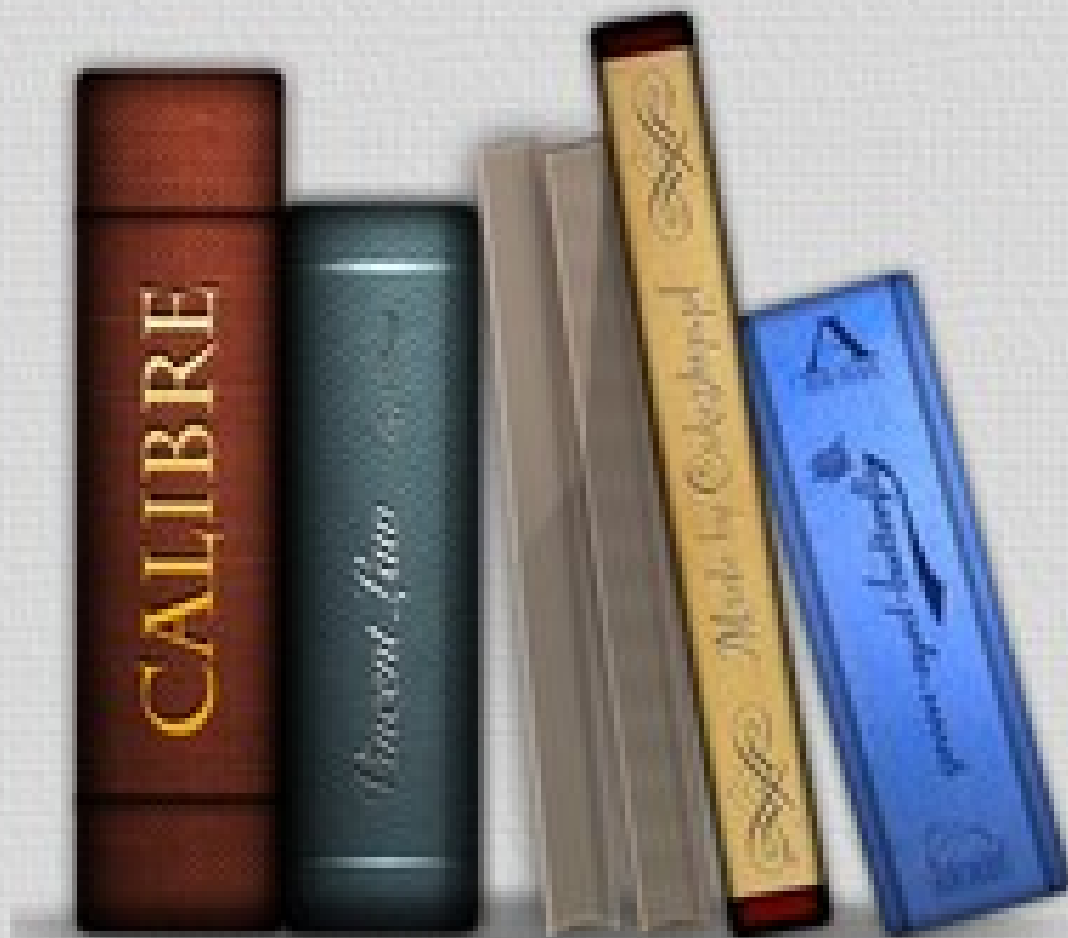


DGuzik 21 Ecclesiastes

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(Ecc 1:1)

Title

The words of the Teacher,¹ the son² of David, king³ in Jerusalem:⁴

(Guzik)

Ecc 1:1-18

Ecclesiastes 1 - The Vanity Of Life

A. Introduction: The Preacher, the author of Ecclesiastes.

1. (Ecc_1:1 a) The Preacher.

The words of the Preacher,

a. The words of the Preacher: The Book of Ecclesiastes is one of the most unusual and perhaps most difficult to understand books of the Bible. It has a spirit of hopeless despair; it has no praise or peace; it seems to promote questionable conduct.

Yet these words of the Preacher show us the futility and foolishness of a life lived without an eternal perspective.

i. The question in Ecclesiastes isn't about the existence of God; the author is no atheist, and God is always there.

The question is whether or not God *matters*. The answer to that question is vitally connected to a responsibility to God that goes beyond this earthly life.

ii. "He does believe in 'God,' but, very significantly, he never uses the sacred name 'Lord.' He has shaken himself free, or wishes to represent a character who has shaken himself free from Revelation, and is fighting the problem of life, its meaning and worth, without any help from Law, or Prophet, or Psalm." (Maclaren) iii. In the search for this answer, the Preacher will search the depths of human experience, including despair. He will thoroughly examine the emptiness

and futility of life lived *without* eternity before coming to the conclusion of the necessity of eternity.

iv. "We face the appalling inference that nothing has meaning, nothing matters under the sun. It is then that we can hear, as the good news which it is, that *everything* matters – 'for God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.'" (Kidner)

v. "What, then, is the purpose of Ecclesiastes? It is an essay in apologetics. It defends the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternative." (Eaton)

vi. "He does not come as a formal philosopher; it is a word from God he has to share, despite his reflective low-key approach. He does not present half-a-dozen arguments for the existence of God. Instead he picks up our own questions. Can you cope with life without having any idea where you are going? You don't have all the answers to life's enigmas, do you? Your neo-pagan view of life doesn't give you any hope of achieving very much, does it?

Nature will not answer your questions, and you are bored by it anyway. History baffles your attempts to understand it. You don't like to think about your own death; yet it is the most certain fact about your existence." (Eaton) vii. "Ecclesiastes does not pretend to preach the Gospel. Rather, it encourages the reader to a God-centered worldview rather than falling victim to frustrations and unanswered questions. None of its contents has to be rejected in the light of the New Testament." (Wright)

b. The Preacher: In Hebrew, this translates the word *Kohleth* (or, *Kobellet*). The idea is of someone who might gather, lead, or speak to a group of people – a congregation.

i. "The word is connected with the Hebrew for assembling, and its form suggests some kind of office-bearer. . . . The many attempts at translating this title include: 'Ecclesiastes', 'The Preacher', 'The Speaker', 'The President', 'The Spokesman', 'The Philosopher'. We might almost add, 'The Professor'!" (Kidner)

ii. These are definitely the words of the Preacher, but in this apologetically oriented sermon his focus on God is indirect. "It makes no mention of Yahweh, the Lord, the name of the God of Israel's covenant faith. It scarcely refers to the law of God, the only possible reference being in Ecc_12:13. It scarcely refers to the nation of Israel (only in Ecc_1:12). Why these omissions? The answer seems to be that the Preacher's argument stands on its own feet and does not depend on Israel's covenant faith to be valid. He is appealing to universally observable facts."

(Eaton)

2. (Ecc_1:1 b) The identity of the Preacher.

The son of David, king in Jerusalem.

a. The son of David: This identifies the Preacher as David's son Solomon. Some believe that another wrote it in Solomon's name, but there is no compelling reason to say that anyone other than Solomon wrote it.

i. "In view of the traditions concerning Solomon (1 Kings 2-12; 2 Chronicles 1-9), without any further definition the title would certainly lead any reader to suppose that the allusion is to him. Also the account in Ecc_2:1-11 is strongly reminiscent of Solomon; almost every phrase has its parallel in the narratives concerning Solomon."

(Eaton)

ii. "There will come another enigmatic note in Ecc_1:16, with its claim to a wisdom 'surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me'. This rules out any successor to the matchless Solomon." (Kidner) b. King in Jerusalem: From his royal standing, Solomon had the wisdom, freedom, resources, and standing to write this work.

i. In a sense, *only* Solomon could write this book. He had both the wisdom and the resources to work through these problems. "With Qoheleth we put on the mantle of a Solomon, that most brilliant and least limited of men, to set our on the search. With every gift and power at our

command, it would be strange if we should come back empty-handed.” (Kidner)

ii. When Solomon wrote this, he did so in a style understood and appreciated in his day. “The particular brand of wisdom that characterizes Ecclesiastes is well attested in the ancient world. We may call it ‘pessimism literature’.

Ecclesiastes is the only biblical example of this old literary tradition.” (Eaton)

iii. “In an Egyptian work, *The Man Who Was Tired of Life*, written between 2300 and 2100 bc, a man disputed with his soul whether life was worth living or whether suicide was the only logical act. ‘Life is a transitory state,’ he complained to himself; ‘you are alive but what profit do you get? Yet you yearn for life like a man of wealth.’ Death is ‘a bringer of weeping’; never again afterwards will a man ‘see the sun’. Little can be done. ‘Follow the happy day and forget care.’” (Eaton)

iv. The Puritan commentator John Trapp wrote what some other also believe, that Ecclesiastes was Solomon’s statement of error and penance, and evidence that he turned back to God at the end of his life – despite the absence of such assurance in 1 Kings 11. “He penned this penitential sermon, grown an old man, he had experimented all this that he here affirmeth, so that he might better begin his speech to his scholars.” (Trapp) B. The problem presented: the meaninglessness of life.

1. (Ecc_1:2) The Preacher’s summary: Life is vanity, without meaning.

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher;

“Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity.”

a. Vanity of vanities: The Preacher begins his sermon with his first conclusion (though not his ultimate conclusion).

Looking at life all around, he judges it to be vanity – nothing, useless, meaningless.

i. “A wisp of vapour, a puff of wind, a mere breath – nothing you could get your hands on; the nearest thing to zero.

That is the ‘vanity’ this book is about.” (Kidner)

ii. “*Vanity* (*hebel*) includes (i) brevity and unsubstantiality, *emptiness* . . . (ii) unreliability, frailty . . . (iii) futility, as in Job_9:29 (Hebrew), where ‘in vanity’ means ‘to no effect’; (iv) deceit (*cf.* Jer_16:19; Zec_10:2).” (Eaton) b. Vanity of vanities: To strengthen his point, the Preacher judged life to be *the ultimate* vanity, the vanity of vanities. This Hebrew phrasing is used to express intensity or the ultimate of something, as in the phrase *holy of holies*.

i. This phrase (or something quite like it) will be used about 30 times in this short book. It is one of the major themes of Ecclesiastes.

c. All is vanity: To further strengthen the point, Solomon noted not only that life is vanity, but that all is vanity. It seemed that every part of life suffered from this emptiness.

i. We see from the first two verses that Solomon wrote this from a certain perspective, a perspective that through the book he will expose and inadequate and wrong. Most all of Ecclesiastes is written from this perspective, through the eyes of a man who thinks and lives as if God doesn’t matter.

ii. “It is an absolutely accurate statement of life when it is lived under certain conditions; but it is not true as a statement of what life must necessarily be.” (Morgan) If you say, “My life isn’t vanity; it isn’t meaningless. My life is filled with meaning and purpose.” That’s wonderful; but you can’t ignore the premise of the Preacher – the premise of life *under the sun*.

iii. Therefore Ecclesiastes is filled with what we might call true lies. Given the perspective “God does not matter,” it is true that all is vanity. Since that perspective is wrong, it *is not true* that all is vanity. Yet Solomon makes us think through this wrong perspective thoroughly through Ecclesiastes.

iv. Solomon thinks through this perspective, but he wasn’t the first nor the last to see life this way. Many moderns judge life to be equally futile.

• • "We all live in a house on fire, no fire department to call; no way out, just the upstairs window to look out of while the fire burns the house down with us trapped, locked in it." (Playwright Tennessee Williams) • • "Most people get a fair amount of fun out of their lives, but on balance life is suffering and only the very young or the very foolish imagine otherwise." (Author George Orwell)

• • "Life is rather like a can of sardines, were all of us looking for the key." (Playwright Alan Bennett) 2. (Ecc_1:3) Life and work under the sun.

What profit has a man from all his labor
In which he toils under the sun?

a. What profit has a man from all his labor: Using the language from the world of business, the Preacher asked a worthy question. He knew that life was filled with labor – but what is it worth? What does it profit?

i. Profit: "A commercial term; life 'pays no dividends'." (Eaton)

ii. Jesus expressed a similar thought in Mar_8:36 : *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*

iii. "All things are sweeter in the ambition than in the fruition. There is a singular vanity in this splendid misery." (Trapp)

b. In which he toils under the sun: This is the first stating of an essential theme through Ecclesiastes. This phrase will be repeated more than 25 times through the book. The idea isn't "on a sunny day" or something having to do with the weather. The idea is "in this world that we can see; the material world." It is life considered *without* an eternal perspective.

i. "If our view of life goes no further than 'under the sun', all our endeavours will have an undertone of misery." (Eaton)

ii. The use of the phrase under the sun "shows that the writer's interest was universal and not limited to only his

own people and land.” (Wright)

3. (Ecc_1:4-7) The unending cycle of creation.

One generation passes away, and *another* generation comes; But the earth abides forever.

The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,

And hastens to the place where it arose.

The wind goes toward the south,

And turns around to the north;

The wind whirls about continually,

And comes again on its circuit.

All the rivers run into the sea,

Yet the sea *is* not full;

To the place from which the rivers come,

There they return again.

a. One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever: Using several examples, the Preacher observes that nothing seems to change very much in the seemingly unending cycle of nature.

i. “He looks out upon humanity, and sees that in one aspect the world is full of births, and in another full of deaths.

Coffins and cradles seem the main furniture, and he hears the tramp, tramp, tramp of the generations passing over a soil honeycombed with tombs.” (Maclaren)

b. The sun also rises . . . The wind goes toward the south . . . the rivers run into the sea: From what Solomon could observe *under the sun*, these unchanging cycles expressed the unchanging monotony of life, leading to its vanity and meaninglessness.

i. “For Old Testament orthodoxy, creation rings with the praises of the Lord. Creation is his. . . . But, says the Preacher, take away its God, and creation no longer reflects his glory; it illustrates the weariness of mankind.”

(Eaton)

ii. “All the rivers of earthly joy may be flowing into your heart, but they will never fill it. They may recede, or dry up,

or ebb; but if not, still they will never satisfy. . . . But in Christ there is perennial interest. . . . We need not go outside of Him for new delights; and to know Him is to possess a secret which makes all things new.” (Meyer) 4. (Ecc_1:8-11)

The unending cycle of man’s labor.

All things *are* full of labor;

Man cannot express *it*.

The eye is not satisfied with seeing,

Nor the ear filled with hearing.

That which has been *is* what will be,

That which *is* done is what will be done,

And *there is* nothing new under the sun.

Is there anything of which it may be said,

“See, this *is* new”?

It has already been in ancient times before us.

There is no remembrance of former *things*, Nor will there be any remembrance of *things* that are to come By *those* who will come after.

a. All things are full of labor; man cannot express it: Solomon then observed that the meaninglessness of life wasn’t only reflected in nature. It was also evident in human effort and endeavor. Despite all man’s working (labor), seeing, and hearing, he is still not satisfied.

i. “It is; impossible to calculate how much anxiety, pain, labour, and fatigue are necessary in order to carry on the *common operations of life*. But an *endless desire of gain*, and an *endless curiosity to witness* a variety of results, cause men to, labour on.” (Clarke) ii. “What is the difference between a squirrel in a cage who only makes his prison go round the faster by his swift race, and the man who lives toilsome days for transitory objects which he may never attain?” (Maclaren) b. That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun: Despite all man’s work and progress, life seems monotonously the same. Things that seem new get

old very quickly, so it could be said “there is nothing new under the sun.”

i. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. “In their new guise the old ways go on. As a race, we never learn.” (Kidner)

ii. There may be nothing new under the sun; but thankfully the followers of Jesus – those born again by God’s Spirit – don’t live under the sun in that sense. Their life is filled with new things.

- • A new name (Isa_62:2, Rev_2:17)
- • A new community (Eph_2:14)
- • A new help from angels (Psa_91:11)
- • A new commandment (Joh_13:34)
- • A new covenant (Jer_31:33, Mat_26:28)
- • A new and living way to heaven (Heb_10:20)
- • A new purity (1Co_5:7)
- • A new nature (Eph_4:24)
- • A new creation in Jesus Christ (2Co_5:17)
- • All things become new! (2Co_5:17, Rev_21:5)

c. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are come: The futility of life seems to work both directions, both into the past and into the future. Man works hard, yet it never seems to make a lasting difference and all is simply forgotten.

i. “How many memorable matters were never recorded! How many ancient records long since perished!”

C. The failure of wisdom to satisfy.

1. (Ecc_1:12-15) Searching by wisdom.

I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

What is crooked cannot be made straight,
And what is lacking cannot be numbered.

a. I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem: Solomon was internationally famous for his great wisdom. If the answers to seeming emptiness of life could be found by wisdom, Solomon was the one find them.

i. Solomon's great wisdom was a gift of God. When God offered him whatever he pleased, he asked for wisdom, especially the wisdom to lead the people of God (1Ki_3:5-28). Therefore God made Solomon so wise that he wrote thousands of proverbs, and he was considered to be wiser than all men of his day (1Ki_4:29-34).

b. I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven: With the unique ability to make such a search, Solomon looked for the answers in wisdom – by which he meant human wisdom that *excluded* answers in the light of eternity.

i. I set my heart to seek and search out: “The two words are not synonymous. The former verb implies penetrating into the depth of an object before one; the other word taking a comprehensive survey of matters further away; so that two methods and scopes of investigation are signified.” (Deane)

ii. This is the wisdom of those who guide us to a better life in the here-and-now; how to live a healthier, happier, more prosperous life. This wisdom certainly has value, and many lives would be better for following it. Yet if it excludes a true appreciation of eternity and our responsibilities in the world to come, this wisdom has no true answer to the meaninglessness of life. It only shows us how to live our meaningless lives *better*.

iii. In other places in Ecclesiastes, wisdom is thought of as a blessing – as it is; even wisdom that excludes eternity (Ecc_7:11-12; Ecc_7:19). Yet this kind of under the sun wisdom can't answer the vanity and meaninglessness of life.

c. All that is done under heaven: *God's* heaven and eternity are not in view here, only the day and night skies. This is another way of saying, “under the sun.” All man's work,

accomplishment, and searching for wisdom seems to amount to nothing.

i. *"All that is done under heaven* shows that the total resources of a limited world-view are the object of study; the vertical aspect is not yet in view." (Eaton) d. This burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised: The seeming futility of life *comes from God*; He has given it to man. God has deliberately built a system where life seems meaningless and vanity without the understanding of a living, active God to whom we must give account.

i. It may seem cruel of God to devise such a system, but it actually evidence of His great love and mercy. He built within us the desire and need for that which brings meaning and fulfillment to live. As Augustine wrote, the Creator made a God-shaped space in each of us, which can only be filled with Him.

ii. This is true not only of us as people, but also as creation. God also subjected creation to this futility until He one day brings the promised fulfillment. *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope* (Rom_8:20).

iii. At the same time, this is a burdensome task. It isn't always easy to find these answers, because our pride, self-reliance, and self-love work against finding them.

e. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered: The Preacher's initial search for the answers in wisdom (under the sun) brought him only despair.

i. "With his usual devastating candour Qoheleth is quick to tell us the worst. The search has come to nothing."
(Kidner)

ii. "The third conclusion explains why the 'under the sun' thinker is so frustrated. It is because there are twists (*what is crooked*) and gaps (*what is lacking*) in all thinking. No matter how the thinker ponders, he cannot straighten out

life's anomalies, nor reduce all he sees to a neat system.”
(Eaton)

2. (Ecc_1:16-18) The failure of wisdom confirmed.

I communed with my heart, saying, “Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.” And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.

For in much wisdom *is* much grief,

And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

a. I communed with my heart: This is natural for anyone who looks for the answers *under the sun*, apart from an eternal perspective. They look *inward* for wisdom and answers, instead of to the God who rules eternity.

b. I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind: The repeated and intensified search for wisdom brought no ultimate meaning. The solution wasn't to think harder and search better; it was all grasping for the wind.

c. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow: The more the Preacher understood life *under the sun*, the greater his despair. The more he learned, the more he realized what he *didn't* know. The more he knew, the more he knew life's sorrows.

i. “So long as wisdom is restricted to the realm ‘under the sun’, it sees the throbbing tumult of creation, life scurrying round its ever-repetitive circuits, and nothing more. ‘The more you understand, the more you ache’

(Moffatt).” (Eaton)

(Ecc 1:2) ***Introduction: Utter Futility***

"Futile! Futile!" laments⁵ the Teacher,⁶

"Absolutely futile!⁷ Everything⁸ is futile!"⁹

(Ecc 1:3) ***Futility Illustrated from Nature***

What benefit¹⁰ do people¹¹ get from all the effort

which¹² they expend¹³ on earth?¹⁴

(Ecc 1:4) A generation comes¹⁵ and a generation goes,¹⁶

but the earth remains¹⁷ the same¹⁸ through the ages.¹⁹

(Ecc 1:5) The sun rises²⁰ and the sun sets;²¹

it hurries away²² to a place from which it rises²³ again.²⁴

(Ecc 1:6) The wind goes to the south and circles around to the north;

round and round²⁵ the wind goes and on its rounds it returns.²⁶

(Ecc 1:7) All the streams flow²⁷ into the sea, but the sea is not full,

and to the place where the streams flow, there they will flow again.²⁸

(Ecc 1:8) All this²⁹ monotony³⁰ is tiresome; no one can bear³¹ to describe it:³²

The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear ever content³³ with hearing.

(Ecc 1:9) What exists now³⁴ is what will be,³⁵

and what has been done is what will be done;

there is nothing truly new on earth.³⁶

(Ecc 1:10) Is there anything about which someone can say, "Look at this! It is new!"?³⁷

It was already³⁸ done long ago,³⁹ before our time.⁴⁰

(Ecc 1:11) No one remembers the former events,⁴¹

nor will anyone remember⁴² the events that are yet to happen;⁴³

they will not be remembered by the future generations.⁴⁴
(Ecc 1:12) ***Futility of Secular Accomplishment***

I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.⁴⁵
(Ecc 1:13) I decided⁴⁶ to carefully⁴⁷ and thoroughly examine⁴⁸

all that has been accomplished on earth.⁴⁹

I concluded:⁵⁰ God has given people⁵¹ a burdensome task⁵²

that keeps them⁵³ occupied.⁵⁴
(Ecc 1:14) I reflected on everything that is accomplished by man⁵⁵ on earth,⁵⁶

and I concluded: Everything⁵⁷ he has accomplished⁵⁸ is futile⁵⁹ — like chasing the wind!⁶⁰
(Ecc 1:15) What is bent⁶¹ cannot be straightened,⁶²

and what is missing⁶³ cannot be supplied.⁶⁴
(Ecc 1:16) ***Futility of Secular Wisdom***

I thought to myself,⁶⁵

"I have become much wiser⁶⁶ than any of my predecessors who ruled⁶⁷ over Jerusalem;⁶⁸

I⁶⁹ have acquired much wisdom and knowledge."⁷⁰
(Ecc 1:17) So I decided⁷¹ to discern the benefit of⁷² wisdom and knowledge over⁷³ foolish behavior and ideas;⁷⁴

however, I concluded⁷⁵ that even⁷⁶ this endeavor⁷⁷ is like⁷⁸ trying to chase the wind!⁷⁹

(Ecc 1:18) For with great wisdom comes⁸⁰ great frustration;

whoever increases his⁸¹ knowledge merely⁸² increases his⁸³ heartache.

(Ecc 2:1) ***Futility of Self-Indulgent Pleasure***

I thought to myself,¹

"Come now,² I will try³ self-indulgent pleasure⁴ to see⁵ if it is worthwhile."⁶

But I found⁷ that it also is futile.⁸

(Guzik)

Ecc 2:1-26

Ecclesiastes 2 - Life In View Of Death

A. The pursuit of pleasure tested – and found lacking.

1. (Ecc_2:1) The summary.

I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also *was* vanity.

a. I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you": The previous section saw Solomon look for the meaning of life in wisdom – wisdom as it can be understood *apart* from eternity. He found no meaning in skillful, wise living *under the sun*. Now he continued his search for meaning, and tested a life of pleasure and amusement.

i. "The Preacher is not testing pleasure so much as himself." (Eaton)

b. Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: Solomon tested life's meaning in mirth and pleasure. He tested the theory many live under today; that the meaning of life is found in more and varied pleasures, entertainments, and excitements.

c. But surely, this also was vanity: The Preacher will shortly explain how he came to this conclusion; but he tells us the result of the testing at the beginning.

2. (Ecc_2:2-3) The search for meaning in pleasure.

I said of laughter – “Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” I searched in my heart *how* to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

a. I said of laughter – “Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” Solomon tested the life lived for laughter, pleasure, and fun. Like a modern celebrity he ran from party to party, entertainment to entertainment. At the end of it all, he judged it to be “Madness” and without accomplishment.

i. Laughter: “A superficial gaiety, used of the ‘fun’ of a game (Proverbs 1);23) or a party (Ecc_10:19), or the ‘derision’ which Jeremiah suffered (Jer_20:7).” (Eaton)

ii. Mirth: “Thoughtful pleasure, the joy of religious festivals (Num_10:10, Jdg_16:23), gratitude in serving the Lord (Deu_28:47), or the proclamation of a king (1Ki_1:40).” (Eaton)

iii. Yet, Eaton is careful to add that “the distinction cannot always be sharply drawn.”

iv. Clarke on laughter and mirth: “He tells the *former* to her face that *she is mad*; but as to the *latter*, he thinks her so much beneath his notice, that he only points at her, and instantly turns his back.”

b. I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine . . . and how to lay hold on folly: The Preacher lived a life satiated with the pleasures of wine and light, frivolous amusements. He wanted to see what was good for the sons of men to do if this life was all there was.

3. (Ecc_2:4-8) The search for meaning in work and accomplishments.

I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I

planted all *kinds* of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, *and* musical instruments of all kinds.

a. I made my works great: The Preacher looked not only for meaning in amusements, but also in great and legitimate accomplishments. He tried to give life meaning through the satisfaction that comes through building and organizing and improving one's environment.

i. "As if he had over-reacted in turning to futile pleasures, he now gives himself to the joys of creativity." (Kidner)

b. Gardens and orchards . . . male and female servants . . . herds and flocks . . . silver and gold: If building, improving, and amassing great riches and accomplishments could give true meaning to life, the Preacher would have found it.

i. Special treasures of kings and of the provinces: "1. The *taxes* levied off his subjects. 2. The *tribute* given by the neighboring potentates. Both these make the 'peculiar treasure of kings;' *taxes* and *tribute*." (Clarke)

ii. Musical instruments of all kinds: "The final item in the list may well refer to Solomon's wives and concubines, but the Hebrew word does not occur elsewhere in the Bible." (Wright) The NIV translates, "Harem" and the RSV

"Concubines." The word might be related to the Hebrew word for *breast*. According to Wright, a Canaanite word of similar form is used to translate the Egyptian word for "concubine." However, the traditional Jewish rendering is musical instruments.

4. (Ecc_2:9-11) The analysis from the search.

So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.
I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,
For my heart rejoiced in all my labor;
And this was my reward from all my labor.
Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done
And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun.

a. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem: Solomon's accomplishments rightly lifted him to prominence, and he had whatever meaning *fame* could bring to life.

b. Also my wisdom remained with me: In all of this Solomon did not lose his wisdom or ability to genuinely assess meaning and fulfillment – at least in an *under the sun* sense.

c. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure: This is even more significant coming from Solomon, who had the resources to grant whatever his eyes desired, and every pleasure of his heart.

i. "How many are there that have died of the wound in the eye!" (Trapp)

d. For my heart rejoiced in all my labor: We might say that the Preacher lived this period as a hedonist, but as an intelligent one. He looked for *legitimate* pleasures in life, such as the rightful pleasure one takes in the accomplishments of hard work (my reward from all my labor).

e. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done . . . indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind: Solomon examined his life lived for pleasure – even legitimate pleasures – and saw that it too was meaningless. All was vanity.

There was no enduring, *eternal* sense of meaning to life lived for these earthly pleasures and accomplishments.

i. "This is as modern as ennui [a feeling of dissatisfaction and uselessness] of every human soul which seeks knowledge, mirth, wealth, life – and forgets God." (Morgan)

B. The certainty and cruelty of death.

1. (Ecc_2:12-17) Death makes equal the wise and the fool.

Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly;

For what *can* the man *do* who succeeds the king? – *Only* what he has already done.

Then I saw that wisdom excels folly

As light excels darkness.

The wise man's eyes *are* in his head,

But the fool walks in darkness.

Yet I myself perceived

That the same event happens to them all.

So I said in my heart,

"As it happens to the fool,

It also happens to me,

And why was I then more wise?"

Then I said in my heart,

"This also *is* vanity."

For *there is* no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, Since all that now *is* will be forgotten in the days to come.

And how does a wise *man* die?

As the fool!

Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun *was* distressing to me, for all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

a. I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly: The Preacher continued to search after meaning and life, and followed the lines of wisdom and madness and folly further, unto their ending point.

b. For what can the man do who succeeds the king? Solomon here spoke of *himself* as the son of David (Ecc_1:1); yet he also spoke of his own successor (who turned out to be

Rehoboam, 1Ki_11:43). Of both, Solomon understood that the new king can do only what he has already done. Even for a king, there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc_1:9).

c. Wisdom excels folly . . . Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all: The Preacher saw the meaninglessness of even wise living, pleasure, and accomplishment in a life lived *under the sun* – apart from the knowledge that eternity is real and God *matters*.

i. No matter how wise one is or is not; how much they do or do not accomplish; or how much pleasure one has or does not have, the same event happens to them all: *they all die*. Given the Preacher's premise – that eternity and God do not matter – this is the only possible conclusion.

ii. "Everything may tell us that wisdom is *not* on a par with folly, not goodness with evil; but no matter: if death is the end of the road, the contention that there is nothing to choose between them will get the last word." (Kidner) d. As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise? If death ends it all, then this life is robbed of true meaning. Even the good and great accomplishments of this world are unbelievably *temporary*, and therefore ultimately meaningless. The wise man dies just as the fool. Truly, the Preacher looked at this and said, "This also is vanity."

e. Therefore I hated life . . . for all is vanity and grasping for the wind: Given his premise of life *under the sun*, Solomon hated life because it was so meaningless (vanity and grasping for the wind).

i. Adam Clarke says that life is more literally *lives*. "*The lives*, both of the *wise*, the *madman*, and the *fool*. Also all the *stages* of life, the *child*, the *man*, and the *sage*. There was nothing in it worth *pursuing*, no *period* worth *re-living* and no *hope* that if this were possible I could again be more successful."

ii. Therefore I hated life: "If there is a lie at the centre of existence, and nonsense at the end of it, who has the heart

to make anything of it?” (Kidner)

iii. “He has no illusions, though by rights it is we who should have none – we who have heard from the secularists themselves that our very planet is dying.” (Kidner)

2. (Ecc_2:18-23) Death defeats all accomplishments.

Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also *is* vanity. Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun.

For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days *are* sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.

a. Then I hated all my labor . . . because I must leave it to a man who will come after me: Not only did Solomon hate life under this thinking (Ecc_2:17), he also hated his very accomplishments, saying of them, “This also is vanity.”

i. The idea that Solomon might leave all his work and material wealth to a fool seemed to trouble him. This concern was well founded, because after Solomon’s death, Rehoboam turned out to be a fool in many ways (1 Kings 12, 1Ki_14:21-31).

ii. “Alas! Solomon, the *wisest* of all men, made the *worst use* of his wisdom, had *seven hundred wives* and *three hundred concubines*, and yet left but *one son* behind him, to possess his *estates* and his *throne*, and that one was the silliest of fools!” (Clarke) b. There is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it: Under his premise, death haunted Solomon. Not in the sense that he seemed

afraid to die, but he despaired of how death (if that ends existence) makes all meaningless.

i. I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun: “The only conclusion is that it is all useless. An abyss of despair results. He ‘allowed [his] heart to despair’ (as the Hebrew verb may be translated). This is one of the most moving points of the Old Testament, the antithesis of the New Testament’s ‘not in vain in the Lord’ (1Co_15:58).” (Eaton)

c. All his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest: If death robs our work of meaning, then life is indeed sorrowful, work is burdensome, and there is no rest or relief from the despair of a meaningless life. Surely, this also is vanity.

i. Actually, it’s worse than vanity. The Preacher also observed that in an under the sun world, this is a great evil.

ii. The Preacher hints at a vital question: *why does this bother us so?* If this is indeed man’s lot and always has been; if every thought of an eternal meaning to life is a wish and a fantasy, *then why does that idea cause discontent in most everyone?* Man may *wish* he could fly like a bird, but there is little sense of meaninglessness in the heart of a man or woman because they cannot fly like a bird. This is because man was *not* designed to fly like a bird; but he *is* designed for eternity.

iii. “Incidentally, this bitter reaction is a witness to our ability to stand clear of our condition and to weigh it up. To be outraged at what is universal and unavoidable suggests something of a divine discontentment, and hint of what the great saying in Ecc_3:11 will call ‘eternity’ in man’s mind.” (Kidner)

C. How to live life “under the sun.”

1. (Ecc_2:24-25) Keeping a good attitude despite despair.

Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This

also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

a. Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink: This thought is prominent in Ecclesiastes, being repeated some five times. It seems that the Preacher advised us how to make the best of a bad situation. If life really is as despairing and meaningless as he has shown it to be, then we should simply accept that true meaning is impossible to find, and simply find contentment in moderate and responsible pleasures.

i. This thinking is prominent in our day. Few people live for true, eternal meaning in their life; so they live with *under the sun* rules. They try to work hard, enjoy life, have fun, be nice, don't get caught doing wrong, and try not to hurt anybody.

ii. This thinking may work in making a bad situation better; but it gives no true *meaning* to life in light of eternity.

iii. "This may seem to savor of epicurism, as may also some following passages of this book. For which cause some of the old Jew doctors were once in a mind to hide this whole book out of the way, and not suffer the common sort to see it any more." (Trapp)

b. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God: We again see that the Preacher is no atheist; he certainly believes in God. But the God of the Preacher is not the God who matters and gives meaning to life as it is connected to eternity. The God of the Preacher simply teaches us to make the best of a bad situation.

i. "Everything is vanity. To live under the sun is to decide at last that the natural thing to do is to take what comes.

Materialism necessarily becomes fatalism." (Morgan)

c. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? Given the Preacher's premise, his life should be the best in a meaningless world. He could enjoy this world of despair better than anyone else. Yet his life was almost infinitely poorer than the most humble life lived with true meaning.

2. (Ecc_2:26) Perhaps the seeming injustice of this world may work to one's favor.

For *God* gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who *is* good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to *him who is* good before God. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

a. God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good: Solomon reflected on how sometimes it seems that what the sinner has gathered and collected is given to him who is good before God. This might seem unjust, but even *under the sun*, sometimes injustice seems to work in one's favor.

i. "The fact that in the end the sinner's hoard will go to the righteous is only a crowning irony to what was in any case *vanity and a striving after the wind*." (Kidner)

b. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind: The Preacher knew that his seeming redistribution from God's hand was not enough to give true meaning to life lived *under the sun*.
(Ecc 2:2) I said of partying,⁹ "It is folly,"

and of self-indulgent pleasure,¹⁰ "It accomplishes nothing!"¹¹

(Ecc 2:3) I thought deeply¹² about the effects of¹³ indulging¹⁴ myself¹⁵ with wine

(all the while¹⁶ my mind was guiding me¹⁷ with wisdom)¹⁸

and the effects of¹⁹ behaving foolishly,²⁰

so that²¹ I might discover what is profitable²²

for people²³ to do on earth²⁴ during the few days²⁵ of their lives.

(Ecc 2:4) ***Futility of Materialism***

I increased my possessions:²⁶

I built houses for myself;²⁷

I planted vineyards for myself.

(Ecc 2:5) I designed²⁸ royal gardens²⁹ and parks³⁰ for myself,

and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

(Ecc 2:6) I constructed pools of water for myself,

to irrigate my grove³¹ of flourishing trees.

(Ecc 2:7) I purchased male and female slaves,

and I owned slaves who were born in my house;³²

I also possessed more livestock — both herds and flocks —

than any of my predecessors in Jerusalem.³³

(Ecc 2:8) I also amassed silver and gold for myself,

as well as valuable treasures³⁴ taken from kingdoms and provinces.³⁵

I acquired male singers and female singers for myself,

and what gives a man sensual delight³⁶ — a harem of beautiful concubines!³⁷

(Ecc 2:9) So³⁸ I was far wealthier³⁹ than all my predecessors in Jerusalem,

yet I maintained my objectivity:⁴⁰

(Ecc 2:10) I did not restrain myself from getting whatever I wanted;⁴¹

I did not deny myself anything that would bring me pleasure.⁴²

So all my accomplishments gave me joy;⁴³

this was my reward for all my effort.⁴⁴

(Ecc 2:11) Yet when I reflected on everything I had accomplished⁴⁵

and on all the effort that I had expended to accomplish it,⁴⁶

I concluded:⁴⁷ "All these⁴⁸ achievements and possessions⁴⁹ are ultimately⁵⁰ profitless⁵¹ — like chasing the wind!

There is nothing gained⁵² from them⁵³ on earth."⁵⁴

(Ecc 2:12) ***Wisdom is Better than Folly***

Next, I decided to consider⁵⁵ wisdom, as well as foolish behavior and ideas.⁵⁶

For what more can the king's successor do than what the king⁵⁷ has already done?

(Ecc 2:13) I realized that wisdom is preferable to folly,⁵⁸

just as light is preferable to darkness:

(Ecc 2:14) The wise man can see where he is going,⁵⁹ but the fool walks in darkness.

Yet I also realized that the same fate⁶⁰ happens to them both.⁶¹

(Ecc 2:15) So I thought to myself, "The fate of the fool will happen even to me!⁶²

Then what did I gain by becoming so excessively⁶³ wise?"⁶⁴

So I lamented to myself,⁶⁵

"The benefits of wisdom⁶⁶ are ultimately⁶⁷ meaningless!"
(Ecc 2:16) For the wise man, like⁶⁸ the fool, will not be remembered for very long,⁶⁹

because⁷⁰ in the days to come, both will already have been forgotten.⁷¹

Alas,⁷² the wise man dies — just like⁷³ the fool!
(Ecc 2:17) So I loathed⁷⁴ life⁷⁵ because what

happens⁷⁶ on earth⁷⁷ seems awful to me;

for all the benefits of wisdom⁷⁸ are futile — like chasing the wind.

(Ecc 2:18) ***Futility of Being a Workaholic***

So I loathed all the fruit of⁷⁹ my effort,⁸⁰

for which I worked so hard⁸¹ on earth,⁸²

because⁸³ I must leave it⁸⁴ behind⁸⁵ in the hands of my successor.⁸⁶

(Ecc 2:19) Who knows if he will be a wise man or a fool?

Yet⁸⁷ he will be master over all the fruit of⁸⁸ my labor⁸⁹

for which I worked so wisely⁹⁰ on earth!⁹¹

This also is futile!

(Ecc 2:20) So I began to despair⁹² about all the fruit of⁹³ my labor⁹⁴

for which I worked so hard⁹⁵ on earth.⁹⁶

(Ecc 2:21) For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill;

however, he must hand over⁹⁷ the fruit of his labor⁹⁸ as an inheritance⁹⁹

to someone else who did not work for it.

This also is futile, and an awful injustice!¹⁰⁰

(Ecc 2:22) ***Painful Days and Restless Nights***

What does a man acquire from all his labor

and from the anxiety that accompanies his toil on earth?¹⁰¹

(Ecc 2:23) For all day long¹⁰² his work produces pain and frustration,¹⁰³

and even at night his mind cannot relax!¹⁰⁴

This also is futile!

(Ecc 2:24) ***Enjoy Work and its Benefits***

There is nothing better for¹⁰⁵ people¹⁰⁶ than¹⁰⁷ to eat and drink,

and to find enjoyment¹⁰⁸ in their¹⁰⁹ work.

I also perceived that this ability to find enjoyment¹¹⁰ comes from God.¹¹¹

(Ecc 2:25) For no one¹¹² can eat and drink¹¹³

or experience joy¹¹⁴ apart from him.¹¹⁵

(Ecc 2:26) For to the one who pleases him,¹¹⁶ God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy,

but to the sinner, he gives the task of amassing¹¹⁷ wealth¹¹⁸ —

only to give¹¹⁹ it¹²⁰ to the one who pleases God.

This¹²¹ task of the wicked¹²² is futile — like chasing the wind!

(Ecc 3:1) ***A Time for All Events in Life***

For everything¹ there is an appointed time,²

and an appropriate time³ for every activity⁴ on earth:⁵
(Guzik)

Ecc 3:1-22

Ecclesiastes 3 - The Reign Of Time, A Glimmer of Hope

A. God and time.

1. (Ecc_3:1-8) A time for every purpose.

To everything *there is* a season,

A time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born,

And a time to die;

A time to plant,

And a time to pluck *what is* planted;

A time to kill,

And a time to heal;

A time to break down,
And a time to build up;
A time to weep,
And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones,
And a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace,
And a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to gain,
And a time to lose;
A time to keep,
And a time to throw away;
A time to tear,
And a time to sew;
A time to keep silence,
And a time to speak;
A time to love,
And a time to hate;
A time of war,
And a time of peace.

a. To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: This list – describing the different seasons and facets of life – is beautiful. Yet it also casts a dark shadow, because it reminds us of the inevitability of trouble and evil, and of the relentless monotony of life.

i. “His ceaseless reiteration of the words, ‘A time . . . a time . . . a time,’ are intended to indicate his sense of the monotony of all things, rather than of their variety.” (Morgan)

ii. “The repetition of ‘a time . . . , and a time . . .’ begins to be oppressive. Whatever may be our skill and initiative, our real masters seem to be these inexorable seasons: not only those of the calendar, but that tide of events which moves us now to one kind of action which seems fitting, now to another which puts all into reverse.” (Kidner)

b. A time to be born,

and a time to die . . . a time to break down, and a time to build up: A bad facet answers each good facet. The Preacher understood that though there are good things in life, the bad things can't be escaped.

i. "Birth and death, the boundaries of life under the sun, are mentioned first." (Wright) ii. A time to kill: "Significantly, the Hebrew word used here for 'to kill,' is not the word reserved for murder in the sixth commandment, where premeditation seems to be in view." (Wright)

iii. A time to dance: The Purity commentator John Trapp seemed to be wary of this time. "Here is nothing for mixed immodest dancings. . . . Where there is dancing, there the devil is, saith a Father: and cannot men be merry unless they have the devil for their playfellow? Dancing, saith another, is a circle, whose centre is the devil, but busily blowing up the fire of lust, as in Herod, that old goat." (Trapp)

iv. A time to cast away stones: In the ancient world they commonly scattered stones on an enemies' land to hinder farming.

v. The poetic quality of the list shows that even the tragic, dark aspects of life can be artfully - and powerfully - presented.

vi. This list also shows us the need to take full advantage of the time God gives us (Eph_5:16, Col_4:15). "Many a man loseth his soul, as Saul did his kingdom, by not discerning his time. Esau came too late; so did the foolish virgins. If the gale of grace be over-past, the gate shut, the drawbridge taken up, there is no possibility of entrance."

(Trapp)

2. (Ecc_3:9-11) A glimmer of hope in seeing God as the master of time.

What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no

one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

a. What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task which the sons of men are to be occupied: The Preacher asked the kind of question he had asked before; but this time he found an answer in the God-given task that God gives to man.

b. He has made everything beautiful in its time: This is in consideration of the poetic list in the previous section. Solomon thought of the good and bad as they were described, and understood that God has made everything beautiful in its time.

c. Also He has put eternity in their hearts: The Preacher understood that man has an awareness and a longing for the eternal, and that God has put this in their hearts. We can say that eternity is in our hearts because we are made in the image of an eternal God.

i. "God made man in his own image; and nothing more surely attests to the greatness of our origin that those faculties of the soul which are capable of yearning for, conceiving, and enjoying the Infinite, the Immortal, and the Divine. . . . Every appetite in nature and grace has its appropriate satisfaction." (Meyer) ii. The well-known missionary and author Don Richardson used the phrase eternity in their hearts to describe the phenomenon of redemptive analogies in most all aboriginal cultures. Almost every culture has traditions, customs, or ways of thinking that reflect basic Biblical truth, and these can be used by missionaries to explain the gospel.

d. Except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end: Though God has given man a long for and awareness of eternity, God has not revealed very much about His eternal work. This keeps the yearning for eternity alive in the heart of man as a yet-to-be-fulfilled longing.

i. "The Preacher's vast researches have found nothing in the finite earthly realm which can satisfy the human heart intellectually or practically . . . This is the nearest he comes to Augustine's maxim: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.'" (Eaton)

3. (Ecc_3:12-15) What the Preacher knows.

I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor – it *is* the gift of God.

I know that whatever God does,
It shall be forever.

Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it.

God does *it*, that men should fear before Him.

That which is has already been,

And what is to be has already been;

And God requires an account of what is past.

a. I know that nothing is better for them to rejoice, and to do good in their lives . . . and enjoy the good of all his labor – it is the gift of God: In light of God's making everything beautiful and in His gift of eternity in their hearts – then it is wise to receive the good things of this life, and to receive them as the gift of God.

i. I know: This "holds out again hope of an enjoyable life from the hand of God . . . sees such a life as man's privilege." (Eaton)

b. I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever: Here the Preacher escapes – ever so briefly – his *under the sun* thinking. It is not the mere mention of God that brings the escape; it is also the knowledge that God is eternal and that this *matters* to us (God does it, that men should fear before Him).

i. I know: This "shows the security of such a life is its divine guarantor . . . sees such a life . . . as God's purpose."

(Eaton)

ii. Eaton sees three aspects of God's action highlighted in Ecc_3:14 :

- • God's actions are permanent (it shall be forever)
- • God's actions are effective and complete (nothing can be added to it)
- • God's actions are totally secure (nothing taken from it)

iii. "All this leads on the part of man to *fear*, not a craven terror in the face of the monstrous or the unknown, but rather the opposite, reverence and awesome regard for God." (Eaton) c. And God requires an account of what is past: Again, this reflects a brief escape from *under the sun* thinking. If God judges the heart and deeds of man, then *everything* has meaning.

i. "God has no abortive enterprises or forgotten men. Once again Qoheleth has shown, in passing, that the despair he describes is not his own, and need not be ours." (Kidner)

B. Injustice is unanswered by death.

1. (Ecc_3:16-17) The problem of injustice and an uneasy assurance of solving this problem.

Moreover I saw under the sun:

In the place of judgment,

Wickedness *was* there;

And *in* the place of righteousness,

Iniquity *was* there.

I said in my heart,

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked,

For *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work."

a. I saw under the sun: in the place of judgment, wickedness was there: Solomon looked at the world – the here and now world, apart from considering eternity – and saw that there was great evil and injustice. Instead of fair judgment he found wickedness; instead of righteousness he found iniquity.

i. "One of the greatest problems in understanding the total plan of God is that reward and punishment sometimes seem conspicuously absent." (Wright)

ii. This is a significant problem under the sun. If man does not have to reckon with eternity; if this life is all there is, then many of the wicked and evil people *win* and many good and righteous people *lose*. The idea of karma does not consistently work – at least not in this life.

b. I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked": The Preacher said – perhaps hoped – that he knew God would judge the righteous and the wicked, and not only in this life. Because there is a time there for every purpose and for every work, God will judge the deeds of man to see if it fit the proper purpose and work.

2. (Ecc_3:18-21) The common fate of animals and humans *under the sun*.

I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are *like* animals." For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other.

Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?

a. Concerning the condition of the sons of men . . . they themselves are like animals: Solomon compared life between humans and animals, and also compared their deaths – doing so in *under the sun*, absent eternity terms. On this basis, he could say that there is little difference in the life and destiny between humans and animals.

i. They themselves are like animals: "The pronoun is repeated emphatically, 'that they themselves are [like] beasts, they in themselves.'" (Deane)

ii. "In their context these verses say that God makes all sensible people realize that they are as much subject to death as is the animal world." (Wright)

b. As one dies, so dies the other: The Preacher thought of an animal dying and its body decomposing. Then he thought that by all outward appearance, the same happens to a human body. Therefore, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity.

i. "The distinction between man and beast is annulled by death; the former's boasted superiority, his power of conceiving and planning, his greatness, skill, strength, cunning, all come under the category of vanity, as they cannot ward off the inevitable blow." (Deane)

ii. This is no argument for the doctrine of annihilationism, the idea that the unrighteous dead simply cease to exist, either immediately or after some time of punishment. It is no argument for two reasons. First, Solomon spoke here as a man unconvinced of eternity and the meaning it brings to life. Second, we believe what 2Ti_1:10 says: that Jesus *brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*. The understanding of the afterlife is cloudy and uncertain in the Old Testament, but not nearly as so in the New Testament.

c. Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?

We sense that the Preacher *hoped* there was a different destiny between people and animals. Yet in his *under the sun* thinking, there was no real reason to believe it – so, "Who knows"?

i. "What is meant by 'upward' and 'downward' may be seen by reference to the gnome in Pro_15:24, 'To the wise the way of life goeth upward, that he may depart from Sheol beneath.'" (Deane)

ii. "The Teacher is speaking phenomenologically, i.e., as things appear to the senses." (Wright) 3. (Ecc_3:22) Finding peace *under the sun*.

So I perceived that nothing *is* better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that *is* his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

a. So I perceived: It is true that Solomon perceived this, but he did so on the faulty assumptions of *under the sun* thinking.

b. Nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works . . . who can bring him to see what will happen after him? After briefly flirting with a confidence in eternity (Ecc_3:9-15), the Preacher has returned to his *under the sun* thinking. Under that premise, nothing is better than for a man to accomplish what he can in this world and try – the best he can – to not trouble himself about what will happen after him.

i. In his *under the sun* thinking, Solomon has an answer for the question, “What will happen after him?” The answer is, *nothing* – because death ends it all, and therefore ultimately his life has no more significance or meaning than the life of an animal.

(Ecc 3:2) A time to be born,⁶ and a time to die;⁷

a time to plant, and a time to uproot what was planted;

(Ecc 3:3) A time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

(Ecc 3:4) A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

(Ecc 3:5) A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

(Ecc 3:6) A time to search, and a time to give something up as lost;⁸

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
(Ecc 3:7) A time to rip, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silent, and a time to speak.
(Ecc 3:8) A time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.
(Ecc 3:9) ***Man is Ignorant of God's Timing***

What benefit can a worker⁹ gain from his toil?¹⁰
(Ecc 3:10) I have observed the burden

that God has given to people¹¹ to keep them occupied.
(Ecc 3:11) God has made everything fit beautifully¹² in its appropriate time,

but¹³ he has also placed ignorance¹⁴ in the human heart¹⁵

so that¹⁶ people¹⁷ cannot discover what God has ordained,¹⁸

from the beginning to the end¹⁹ of their lives.²⁰
(Ecc 3:12) ***Enjoy Life in the Present***

I have concluded²¹ that there is nothing better for people²² than²³ to be happy and to enjoy themselves²⁴ as long as they live,

(Ecc 3:13) and also that everyone should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all his toil, for these things²⁵ are a gift from God.

(Ecc 3:14) ***God's Sovereignty***

I also know that whatever God does will endure forever;

nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from it.

God has made it this way, so that men will fear him.

(Ecc 3:15) Whatever exists now has already been, and whatever will be has already been; for God will seek to do again²⁶ what has occurred²⁷ in the past.²⁸

(Ecc 3:16) ***The Problem of Injustice and Oppression***

I saw something else on earth:²⁹

In the place of justice, there was wickedness,

and in the place of fairness,³⁰ there was wickedness.

(Ecc 3:17) I thought to myself, "God will judge both the righteous and the wicked;

for there is an appropriate time for every activity,

and there is a time of judgment³¹ for every deed.

(Ecc 3:18) I also thought to myself, "It is³² for the sake of people,³³

so God can clearly³⁴ show³⁵ them that they are like animals.

(Ecc 3:19) For the fate of humans³⁶ and the fate of animals are the same:

As one dies, so dies the other; both have the same breath.

There is no advantage for humans over animals,

for both are fleeting.

(Ecc 3:20) Both go to the same place,

both come from the dust,

and to dust both return.

(Ecc 3:21) Who really knows if the human spirit³⁷ ascends upward,

and the animal's spirit descends into the earth?

(Ecc 3:22) So I perceived there is nothing better than for people³⁸ to enjoy their work,³⁹

because that is their⁴⁰ reward;

for who can show them what the future holds?⁴¹

(Ecc 4:1) ***Evil Oppression on Earth***

So¹ I again considered² all the oppression³ that continually occurs⁴ on earth.⁵

This is what I saw:⁶

The oppressed⁷ were in tears,⁸ but no one was comforting them;

no one delivers⁹ them from the power of their oppressors.¹⁰
(Guzik)

Ecc 4:1-16

Ecclesiastes 4 - Bittersweet Accomplishments

A. The tragedy of oppression.

1. (Ecc_4:1) The comfortless oppression of man under the sun.

Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun:

And look! The tears of the oppressed,

But they have no comforter—

On the side of their oppressors *there is* power,

But they have no comforter.

a. I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: After a brief flirtation with hope, the Preacher once again turned to despair at the end of Ecclesiastes 3 when he considered the problem of injustice. Continuing on the same lines, he now considered all the oppression that is done under the sun.

i. “Compassion for the *oppressed* is common in the Old Testament.” (Eaton) • • Oppression of people by a king (Pro_28:16)

• • Oppression of a servant by his master (Deu_24:14)

• • Oppression of the poor by the affluent (Pro_22:16)

• • Oppression of the poor by the bureaucratic (Ecc_5:8)

• • Oppression of the poor by other poor people (Pro_28:3)

• • Oppression of the alien, the fatherless, and the widow (Jer_7:6; Eze_22:7; Zec_7:10) • • Oppression by charging

high interest (Eze_22:12; Eze_22:29)

- · Oppression by using false weights and measures (Hos_12:7)

b. The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter: Solomon thought of the painful and tear-filled lives of the oppressed. In an under the sun world – where this life is all there is; men and women give no account for their lives in a world to come – the tears of the oppressed are especially bitter and they have no comforter.

i. “Oh the tears for the oppressed; the tiny children; the terror-stricken fugitives from the Turk, the European trader, and the drunken tyrant of the home! Through all the centuries tears have flowed, enough to float a navy.”

(Meyer)

2. (Ecc_4:2-3) Because of oppression and sadness, man is better off dead.

Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead,

More than the living who are still alive.

Yet, better than both *is he* who has never existed,

Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

a. Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead: The thought of both oppressors and their victims finding no justice in eternity was so bitter to the Preacher that he thought the dead fortunate. In an under the sun world, the dead do not have to think about such painful things.

i. Solomon could only praise the dead this way because at his time he had no certain knowledge of the world to come, and he wrote most of Ecclesiastes with an *under the sun* premise. If he knew and accepted what happened to the unrighteous dead, he would never say such a thing. “Men, like silly fishes, see one another caught and jerked out of the pond of life but they see not, alas! the fire and the pan into which they are cast that die in their sins.”

(Trapp)

ii. The dead who were already dead is an interesting phrase. It implies that there are the dead who are not yet dead – the

living dead, so to speak. They walk this earth and have biological life, but their spirit and soul seem dead.

b. Better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun: Solomon took the idea of praising the dead even further, to where he no praised he who has never existed. Even the dead were once alive and had to see the evil work that is done under the sun.

i. "There is nothing sadder in the whole book than the wistful glance in Ecc_4:2-3 at the dead and the unborn, who are spared the sight of so much anguish." (Kidner)

ii. Jesus Himself said there was one man for whom it would have been better if he had never been born: Judas (Mat_26:24).

iii. The Preacher's great despair over the injustice of oppression in an under the sun premise shows the moral necessity of an afterlife and a coming judgment. Jesus told us that it is those who oppress and misuse their power who will ultimately endure punishment, not their victims (Mat_18:6-7).

B. Bittersweet accomplishments.

1. (Ecc_4:4-6) Success often gains the envy of one's neighbor.

Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

The fool folds his hands

And consumes his own flesh.

Better a handful *with* quietness

Than both hands full, *together with* toil and grasping for the wind.

a. For all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor: The Preacher thought of those who gain success through toil and skillful work – and how it simply brought envy and sometimes hatred from others. This common

jealousy of success made life seem like vanity and grasping for the wind.

i. “For if a man act uprightly and properly in the world, he soon becomes the object of his neighbour's envy and calumny too. Therefore the encouragement to do good, to act an upright part, is very little. This constitutes a part of the *vain* and *empty* system of human life.” (Clarke) b. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh: Solomon here answered the tendency for those jealous of the success of others to be lazy. Like fools, they fold their hands and do nothing – and so waste away. Yet it wasn't the success of their neighbor that made them waste away; the foolish, lazy man consumes his own flesh.

i. Consumes his own flesh: “This expression is really equivalent to ‘destroys himself,’ ‘brings ruin upon himself.’” (Deane) A similar thought from a different perspective is found in Psa_27:2.

c. Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind: The Preacher reflects on the value of *contentment*. It is better to have less and be content (with quietness) than to have more and constantly be grasping for more on top.

i. Solomon weaved some fascinating themes together.

- • Hard work and success are good and not to be envied.
- • Laziness is wrong and destructive.
- • Yet even the one with full hands must learn contentment.

2. (Ecc_4:7-8) What good is your success if you can't pass it on?

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:

There is one alone, without companion:

He has neither son nor brother.

Yet *there is* no end to all his labors,

Nor is his eye satisfied with riches.

But he never asks,

“For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?”

This also *is* vanity and a grave misfortune.

a. There is one alone, without companions: Solomon thought of a man alone, without family or close friends.

b. Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches: The man in Solomon's thinking works hard and wants to gain more and more.

c. But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" The Preacher thought this unexamined life of hard work and success – without family and friends to share in it all – is vanity and a grave misfortune.

i. The Preacher was entirely correct from an *under the sun* perspective. Under that premise, there is no such thing as an eternal accomplishment and one does not even have the *potential* satisfaction of passing one's accomplishments on to another.

ii. "This picture of lonely, pointless busyness, equally with that of jealous rivalry in verse 4, checks any excessive claims we might wish to make for the blessings of hard work." (Kidner)

3. (Ecc_4:9-12) Without a friend, accomplishments are vain.

Two *are* better than one,

Because they have a good reward for their labor.

For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.

But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls,

For *he has* no one to help him up.

Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;

But how can one be warm *alone*?

Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.

And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

a. Two are better than one: In the previous section Solomon thought how even in an *under the sun* world, living alone made life worse. He continues to develop the same idea, noting that two are better than one and will begin to state the reasons why this is true.

i. "Having looked at the poverty of the 'loner', whatever his outward success, we now reflect on something better; and

better will be a key word here.” (Kidner)

b. Because they have a good reward for their labor: In a good partnership, two can accomplish more than each one individually. The sum will be greater than the parts.

c. If they fall, one will lift up his companion: When two work and live together they can help each other in difficult times – but woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. The Preacher understood that everybody *needs* help, and it is a blessing to both give and to receive help.

d. If two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? When two work and live together they can bring comfort to the lives of each other.

e. Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him: When two work and live together, they can bring security and safety to each other. To use a phrase, they can “watch the back” of one another.

i. These four verses show us the great value of human relationships, that two are better than one. Living and working together is a great advantage to living and working alone, and adds these four things to life: • • Productivity (they have a good reward for their labor)

- • Help in need (If they fall, one will lift up his companion)

- • Comfort in life (they will keep warm)

- • Safety and security (two can withstand)

f. A threefold cord is not quickly broken: The Preacher gives a fascinating final line to this section dealing with the goodness of companionship. We might have expected that he would praise the strength of a *twofold* cord; instead he noted that a threefold is not quickly broken. It is commonly understood that the *third* cord is God Himself, and that a relationship intertwined with God is a threefold cord that is not quickly broken.

i. “The strength of the three-ply cord was proverbial in the ancient world.” (Eaton)

ii. This is commonly applied – and well applied – to the idea of recognizing and embracing God in the marriage relationship. Yet it is possible that, in the context of marriage and family, Solomon had *children* in mind with the picture of a threefold cord.

4. (Ecc_4:13-16) The vanity of fame and its short life.

Better a poor and wise youth

Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.

For he comes out of prison to be king,

Although he was born poor in his kingdom.

I saw all the living who walk under the sun;

They were with the second youth who stands in his place.

There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him.

Surely this also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

a. Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more: The Preacher begins this section with a proverb, observing that it is better to be poor and wise (and young!) than to be old, foolish and have great wealth and status.

b. He comes out of prison to be king: The Solomon thought of a second young man, who rose out of misfortune and obscurity to achieve great wealth, status, and fame (there was no end of all the people over whom he was made king).

c. Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him: As Solomon thought of this young man who achieved much and became famous, he understood that the fame would be short-lived. Even if it lasted his entire lifetime (which would be rare and remarkable), it would not live on much beyond his own life. With his *under the sun* premise, this thought brought the familiar conclusion to the Preacher: Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

i. “He has reached a pinnacle of human glory, only to be stranded there. It is yet another of our human anticlimaxes and ultimately empty achievements.” (Kidner)

(Ecc 4:2) So I considered¹¹ those who are dead and gone¹²

more fortunate than those who are still alive.¹³

(Ecc 4:3) But better than both is the one who has not been born¹⁴

and has not seen the evil things that are done on earth.¹⁵

(Ecc 4:4) ***Labor Motivated by Envy***

Then I considered¹⁶ all the skillful work¹⁷ that is done:

Surely it is nothing more than¹⁸ competition¹⁹ between one person and another.²⁰

This also is profitless — like²¹ chasing the wind.

(Ecc 4:5) The fool folds his hands and does no work,²²

so he has nothing to eat but his own flesh.²³

(Ecc 4:6) Better is one handful with some rest

than two hands full of toil²⁴ and chasing the wind.

(Ecc 4:7) ***Labor Motivated by Greed***

So²⁵ I again considered²⁶ another²⁷ futile thing on earth:²⁸

(Ecc 4:8) A man who is all alone with no companion,²⁹

he has no children nor siblings;³⁰

yet there is no end to all his toil,

and he³¹ is never satisfied with riches.

He laments,³² "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself³³ of pleasure?"³⁴

This also is futile and a burdensome task!³⁵

(Ecc 4:9) ***Labor is Beneficial When Its Rewards Are Shared***

Two people are better than one,

because they can reap³⁶ more benefit³⁷ from their labor.

(Ecc 4:10) For if they fall, one will help his companion up,

but pity³⁸ the person who falls down and has no one to help him up.

(Ecc 4:11) Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm,

but how can one person keep warm by himself?

(Ecc 4:12) Although an assailant may overpower³⁹ one person,

two can withstand him.

Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.

(Ecc 4:13) ***Labor Motivated by Prestige-Seeking***

A poor but wise youth is better than an old and foolish king

who no longer knows how to receive advice.

(Ecc 4:14) For he came out of prison⁴⁰ to become king,

even though he had been born poor in what would become his⁴¹ kingdom.

(Ecc 4:15) I considered all the living who walk on earth,⁴²

as well as the successor⁴³ who would arise⁴⁴ in his place.

(Ecc 4:16) There is no end to all the people⁴⁵ nor to the past generations,⁴⁶

yet future generations⁴⁷ will not rejoice in him.

This also is profitless and like⁴⁸ chasing the wind.

(Ecc 5:1) ***Rash Vows*** 1

Be careful what you do² when you go to the temple³ of God;

draw near to listen⁴ rather than to offer a sacrifice⁵ like fools,⁶

for they do not realize that they are doing wrong.

(Guzik)

Ecc 5:1-20

Ecclesiastes 5 - Reverent Worship

A. Worshipping God reverently.

1. (Ecc_5:1-3) Come to the house of God more to hear and to obey than to speak.

Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

Do not be rash with your mouth,

And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.

For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth;

Therefore let your words be few.

For a dream comes through much activity,

And a fool's voice *is known* by *his* many words.

a. Walk prudently when you go to the house of God: Solomon here brings good advice that does not contradict his *under the sun* premise. Even apart from eternity, it would be wise to honor God and walk prudently when you go to the house of God for the sake of this life alone.

b. Walk prudently when you go to the house of God: The Preacher will explain more of what this means in the coming lines. Yet generally we can say that it means to show care and think about consequences when we come to meet God.

i. "Fruitful and acceptable worship begins before it begins." (Maclaren)

c. Draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools: The sacrifice of fools is the hasty speech mentioned in the next lines. Solomon counsels us to come to the house of God to hear more than to speak without thinking.

i. To hear: "Has the double force in Hebrew which it sometimes has in English: to pay attention and to obey. So this saying is close to the famous words of Samuel, 'to obey (literally to listen) is better than sacrifice' (1Sa_15:22)." (Kidner)

ii. "They who fall into the faults condemned are 'fools.' If that class includes all who mar their worship by such errors, the church which holds them had need to be of huge dimensions; for the faults held up in these ancient words flourish in full luxuriance to-day." (Maclaren)

iii. Sacrifice: "The *zebah* was an offering killed in sacrifice and then used for a meal, in contrast to the whole burnt-offering (*ola*) which was totally consumed in sacrifice. As Delitzsch points out, it is the *zebah* which could degenerate into thoughtless festivity, or worse." (Eaton)

d. Do not be rash with your mouth . . . for God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few: Solomon rightly described the human tendency to speak without thinking

before God and others. Even with an *under the sun* premise, it is foolish to speak too much and hear too little in God's presence.

i. "When we come before God, our minds are full of our own business rather than with the worship of God. When we talk too much, we usually talk like fools. This can be especially bad in the house of God." (Wright)

ii. The priests of Baal prayed hard and long on Mount Carmel; Elijah prayed short and sweet, and full of faith to the living God. God heard and beautifully answered Elijah's prayer (1 Kings 18).

iii. J. Edwin Orr used to advise brief, earnest prayers, especially in prayer meetings. He said that when one prays in a meeting, for his first three minutes everyone prays *with* him. Should he continue a second three minutes, everyone prays *for* him. Should he continue for a third three minutes, the others start to pray *against* him.

iv. "For as it is not the loudness of a preacher's voice, but the weight and holiness of his matter, and the spirit of the preacher, that moves a wise and intelligent hearer, so it is not the labour of the lips, but the travail of the heart that prevails with God." (Trapp)

e. A dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words: The thought in this line is probably well represented by the Living Bible: "Just as being too busy gives you nightmares, so being a fool makes you a blabbermouth."

i. "As personal and business cares produce dreams, which are unsubstantial things; so many words produce foolish and empty prayers." (Wright)

2. (Ecc_5:4-7) Keep your vows and fear God.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;

For *He has* no pleasure in fools.

Pay what you have vowed—

Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger *of God* that it *was* an error. Why should God

be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there is* also vanity. But fear God.

a. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it: Even with an *under the sun* premise, it is both honorable and wise to honor God by keeping one's word to Him. It would be better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

i. "God does not take broken vows lightly. A broken vow may incur his judgment upon our endeavours. One who 'swears to his own hurt and does not change' pleases God (Psa_15:4)." (Eaton)

ii. A commonly overlooked and unappreciated sin among God's people is the sin of *broken vows* - promising things to God and failing to live up to the vow. Those who honor God:

- • Will not be quick to make vows to God.
- • Will be serious about fulfilling vows made.
- • Will regard broken vows as sins to confessed and to be repented of.

b. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say . . . that it was an error: The Preacher rightly observed that it was important for God's people to regard their *failure* to keep vows as a serious matter, and that great effort should be put into keeping vows and not regarding the failure to keep them as simply an "error."

i. Say before the messenger of God that it was an error: "Hebrew draws no distinction between *messenger* and *angel*, so several interpretations are open to us here." (Eaton)

c. Fear God: Solomon counseled reverence and honor towards God, but in his *under the sun* perspective the value is found in the here-and-now, not unto eternity.

i. "Most certainly, he that fears God need fear nothing else. Well may an upright soul say to *Satan* himself, I fear God; and because I fear *him*, I do not fear *thee*." (Clarke) B. The vanity of wealth and materialism.

1. (Ecc_5:8-9) The enduring fact of oppression and injustice.

If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. Moreover the profit of the land is for all; *even* the king is served from the field.

a. If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice . . . do not marvel at the matter: The Preacher spoke realistically about life *under the sun*. There is much oppression and perversion of justice. It should surprise no one.

i. "For all his hatred of injustice, Qoheleth pins no hopes on utopian schemes or on revolution. He knows what is in man." (Kidner)

b. For high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them: Solomon was especially aware of how bureaucracies can bring oppression.

c. Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field: Even with a complex (and possibly corrupt) bureaucracy, *everyone* depends on what comes from the farmer's field – even the king. The Preacher seemed to delight in these ironies of life.

i. "Without the field he cannot have supplies for his own house; and, unless *agriculture* flourish, the necessary expenses of the state cannot be defrayed. Thus, God joins the *head* and *feet* together; for while the peasant is protected by the king as executor of the laws, the king himself is dependent on the peasant; as the wealth of the nation is the fruit of the labourer's toil."

ii. "Some read it thus: *Rex agro servit*, The king is a servant to the field." (Trapp) 2. (Ecc_5:10-12) Dissatisfaction in the accumulation of wealth.

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver;

Nor he who loves abundance, with increase.

This also *is* vanity.

When goods increase,

They increase who eat them;
So what profit have the owners
Except to see *them* with their eyes?
The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet,
Whether he eats little or much;
But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.
a. He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver: Of all people, Solomon knew that the gathering of riches did not satisfy. He knew, this also is vanity.
i. "If anything is worse than the addiction money brings, it is the emptiness it leaves. Man, with eternity in his heart, needs better nourishment than this." (Kidner)
b. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners: Solomon knew that as one's net worth increased, so did one's expenses – *and* the expectation of others.
i. "Servants, friends, flatterers, trencher-men, pensioners, and other hangbys that will flock to a rich man, as crows do to a dead carcase, not to defend, but to devour it." (Trapp)
c. The sleep of the laboring man is sweet . . . the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep: Solomon indulged an envy of the laboring man, who has so much less to worry about. The rich man has greater worries and less sleep.
i. We may suppose that Solomon found little sympathy from the laboring man.

3. (Ecc_5:13-17) The uncertainty of wealth.

There is a severe evil *which* I have seen under the sun:
Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.
But those riches perish through misfortune;
When he begets a son, *there is* nothing in his hand.
As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return,
To go as he came;
And he shall take nothing from his labor
Which he may carry away in his hand.
And this also *is* a severe evil—
Just exactly as he came, so shall he go.

And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?

All his days he also eats in darkness,

And *he has* much sorrow and sickness and anger.

a. A severe evil . . . riches kept for their owner to his hurt: Solomon then observed that wealth does not *bless* the life of every wealthy person. Especially those who keep their riches with an ungenerous, clenched fist, they are riches kept for their owner his hurt.

i. “Rather, *preserved by the possessor*, hoarded and guarded, only to bring their lord added grief when by some reverse of fortune he loses them, as explained in what follows.” (Deane)

b. But those riches perish through misfortune . . . he shall take nothing from his labor: This shows further the foolishness of holding on to wealth in an ungenerous way. Wealth can disappear suddenly through misfortune; yet we lose all wealth in death. Solomon knew that despite the burial wishes and customs of the pharaohs, one cannot take their wealth with them after death.

i. “The riches were suddenly and catastrophically lost, whether in foolish gambling, in a misguided venture, or in a sudden reversal of circumstances.” (Eaton)

c. Just exactly as he came, so shall he go: Solomon understood that great wealth ultimately means nothing *under the sun*.

Man comes with nothing into the world and leaves the same way.

i. The New Testament gives a more hopeful picture, taking us beyond the Preacher’s *under the sun* premise and telling us that we can lay up treasure in heaven. You can’t take your wealth with you when you die; but you can send it on ahead by generous giving to God’s work.

d. All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger: With a sympathetic touch, Solomon tells us the loneliness, sorrow, and anger there is even for those who have great wealth.

4. (Ecc_5:18-20) Making the best of a bad situation *under the sun*.

Here is what I have seen: *It is* good and fitting *for one* to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it *is* his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor – this *is* the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps *him* busy with the joy of his heart.

a. It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun: We sense that Solomon – still very much with the premise of *under the sun* – simply hoped to make the best of a bad situation.

b. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth . . . this is the gift of God: Though the Preacher knew that riches did not bring true meaning to life, he was no fool. He understood that it was better to have wealth than to not have it, and *under the sun*, one should enjoy both wealth and the capacity to enjoy it as the gift of God.

i. “Indeed, the very care of wealth becomes a reason for restlessness. In view of all these things there is but one attitude, which the preacher advises: Do not hoard anything, but enjoy it.” (Morgan)

c. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart: This was Solomon’s counsel to the wealthy man who finds no ultimate meaning *under the sun*. Simply, *try not to think about it and keep yourself busy*.

(Ecc 5:2) Do not be rash with your mouth or hasty in your heart to bring up a matter before God,
for God is in heaven and you are on earth!

Therefore, let your words be few.

(Ecc 5:3) Just as dreams come when there are many cares,⁷

so⁸ the rash vow⁹ of a fool occurs¹⁰ when there are many words.

(Ecc 5:4) When you make a vow¹¹ to God, do not delay in paying it.¹²

For God¹³ takes no pleasure in fools:

Pay what you vow!

(Ecc 5:5) It is better for you not to vow

than to vow and not pay it.¹⁴

(Ecc 5:6) Do not let your mouth cause you¹⁵ to sin,

and do not tell the priest,¹⁶ "It was a mistake!"¹⁷

Why make God angry at you¹⁸

so that he would destroy the work of your hands?"

(Ecc 5:7) Just as there is futility in many dreams,

so also in many words.¹⁹

Therefore, fear God!

(Ecc 5:8) ***Government Corruption***

If you see the extortion²⁰ of the poor,

or the perversion²¹ of justice and fairness in the government,²²

do not be astonished by the matter.

For the high official is watched by a higher official,²³

and there are higher ones over them!²⁴

(Ecc 5:9) The produce of the land is seized²⁵ by all of them,

even the king is served²⁶ by the fields.²⁷

(Ecc 5:10) ***Covetousness***

The one who loves money²⁸ will never be satisfied with money,²⁹

he who loves wealth³⁰ will never be satisfied³¹ with his³² income.

This also is futile.

(Ecc 5:11) When someone's³³ prosperity³⁴ increases, those who consume it also increase;

so what does its owner³⁵ gain, except that he gets to see it with his eyes?³⁶

(Ecc 5:12) The sleep of the laborer is pleasant — whether he eats little or much —

but the wealth of the rich will not allow him to sleep.

(Ecc 5:13) ***Materialism Thwarts Enjoyment of Life***

Here is³⁷ a misfortune³⁸ on earth³⁹ that I have seen:

Wealth hoarded by its owner to his own misery.

(Ecc 5:14) Then that wealth was lost through bad luck;⁴⁰

although he fathered a son, he has nothing left to give him.⁴¹

(Ecc 5:15) Just as he came forth from his mother's womb, naked will he return as he came, and he will take nothing in his hand that he may carry away from his toil.

(Ecc 5:16) This is another misfortune:⁴²

Just as he came, so will he go.

What did he gain from toiling for the wind?

(Ecc 5:17) Surely, he ate in darkness every day of his life,⁴³

and he suffered greatly with sickness and anger.

(Ecc 5:18) ***Enjoy the Fruit of Your Labor***

I have seen personally what is the only beneficial and appropriate course of action for people:⁴⁴

to eat and drink,⁴⁵ and find enjoyment in all their⁴⁶ hard work⁴⁷ on earth⁴⁸

during the few days of their life which God has given them,

for this is their reward.⁴⁹

(Ecc 5:19) To every man whom God has given wealth, and possessions,

he has also given him the ability⁵⁰

to eat from them, to receive his reward and to find enjoyment in his toil;

these things⁵¹ are the gift of God.

(Ecc 5:20) For he does not think⁵² much about the fleeting⁵³ days of his life

because God keeps him preoccupied⁵⁴ with the joy he derives from his activity.⁵⁵

(Ecc 6:1) ***Not Everyone Enjoys Life***

Here is¹ another misfortune² that I have seen on earth,³

and it weighs⁴ heavily on people:⁵

(Guzik)

Ecc 6:1-12

Ecclesiastes 6 - Wealth Can't Satisfy

A. The weakness of wealth

1. (Ecc_6:1-2) Others can take one's wealth.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it *is* common among men: A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil affliction.

a. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun: The Preacher still speaks from his under the sun premise.

b. A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing . . . yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it: Solomon saw the tragedy of those who are given great gifts from God – yet they do not have the opportunity to enjoy what God gives. Solomon understood this to be vanity and an evil affliction.

2. (Ecc_6:3-6) The meaningless of life that does not go beyond death.

If a man begets a hundred *children* and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say *that* a stillborn child *is* better than he – for it comes in vanity

and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. Though it has not seen the sun or known *anything*, this has more rest than that man, even if he lives a thousand years twice – but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?

a. If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years . . . but his soul is not satisfied with goodness: The Preacher knew that a man could have all the outward signs of a good life – but still not be satisfied with goodness.

i. “One could have the things men dream of – which in Old Testament terms meant children by the score, and years of life by the thousand – and still depart unnoticed, unlamented, and unfulfilled.” (Kidner) ii. “Like the Mosaic law (*cf.* Gal_3:22), the Preacher is slamming every door except the door of faith.” (Eaton) b. I say that a stillborn child is better than he: This is a bitter statement, the kind we might expect from one who had suffered like Job (Job 3). Yet Solomon – with all his blessings and advantages – felt and knew the same despair of life as Job had. Life seemed so meaningless that he felt it would be better if he were never born.

i. “To die unburied was the mark of a despised and unmourned end. Better to miscarry at birth than to miscarry throughout life.” (Eaton)

c. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man, even if he lives a thousand years twice – but has not seen goodness: In Solomon’s mind, the stillborn child – tragic as it is – is better off than the man who knows the crushing disappointment of the realization of meaninglessness, even if he lives a thousand years.

d. Do not all go to one place? Solomon writes with his *under the sun* perspective, and shares much of the Old Testament uncertainty about the afterlife.

B. What good is it all?

1. (Ecc_6:7-9) Suffering under dissatisfaction.

All the labor of man *is* for his mouth,

And yet the soul is not satisfied.

For what more has the wise *man* than the fool?

What does the poor man have,

Who knows *how* to walk before the living?

Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire.

This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

a. All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied: Man works for the very bread he eats, yet it does not satisfy his soul. Solomon sensed what Moses had already said and Jesus later repeated: *Man does not live by bread alone* (Deu_8:3, Mat_3:4).

b. What more has the wise man than the fool? Wisdom itself can't fill a hungry man's stomach. For all the superiority of the wise man compared to the fool, they both get hungry. Being wise isn't as much of an advantage as commonly thought.

i. "The necessities of life are the same to both, and their *condition* in life is nearly similar; liable to the same diseases, dissolution, and death." (Clarke)

c. Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire: The Preacher knew that in a world of such uncertainty and absence of meaning, that what one can actually see is always better than what one merely desires.

2. (Ecc_6:10-12) The futility of feeling that nothing can make it better.

Whatever one is, he has been named already,

For it is known that he *is* man;

And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.

Since there are many things that increase vanity,

How *is* man the better?

For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

a. Whatever one is, he has been named already: This is a fatalistic view of God's sovereignty. The idea is that God is

completely in control, and whatever one is, it is because the all-powerful God has named it already.

i. "Since God is supreme, he has surely predestined everything and has made man too weak to resist. Reasoning, complaining, and arguing bring no answer and lead to further frustration." (Wright)

b. He cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he: Solomon's great frustration is rooted in the understanding that man is man, God is God, and man can never successfully contend with Him who is mightier than he.

i. Many today refuse to know what the Preacher knew. They believe that when they face God (abandoning Solomon's *under the sun* premise) they will in fact contend with Him, and tell God a thing or two. Such are seriously and sadly deluded.

ii. "God will have the better of those that contend with him: and his own reason will tell him that it is not fit that God should cast down the bucklers first: and that the deeper a man wades, the more he shall be wet." (Trapp) c. Since there are many things that increase vanity, how is man the better? The Preacher felt that life was a game that could not be won. There were too many things that increase vanity that ultimately man would become no better.

i. "Evidently the thought of the preacher is that the more a man possesses under the sun, the more profoundly conscious does he become of the vanity and vexation of it all." (Morgan)

d. For who knows what is good for man in life: We often *think* we know what is good for us; but do we really? In the course of a life, which is better: Wealth or poverty? Health or sickness? Fame or obscurity? Many who have what is commonly thought of as good are not the better for it.

e. All the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? Solomon looked to life and it seemed vain and a

shadow. He looked to death and saw only darkness and uncertainty.

To this point there is little relief from the tragedy of meaninglessness of life (and death) *under the sun*.

i. "So the chapter will wind its way down to a depressing and uncertain finish, well suited to the state of man on his own." (Kidner)

ii. We can explain Solomon's lack of knowledge of the afterlife by understanding the principle of 2Ti_2:10 : that Jesus Christ *brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*. The understanding of immortality was at best cloudy in the Old Testament, but is much clearer in the New Testament. For example, we can say that Jesus knew fully what He was talking about when He described hell and judgment (such as in Mat_25:41-46). We therefore rely on the *New Testament* for our understanding of the afterlife, much more than the *Old*.

iii. We also understand that this does not in any way take away from the truth of the Bible and the Book of Ecclesiastes. What is true is that Solomon actually wrote this and actually believed it (with his *under the sun* premise); the truth of the statement itself must be evaluated according to the rest of the Bible.

(Ecc 6:2) God gives a man riches, property, and wealth

so that he lacks nothing that his heart⁶ desires,⁷

yet God does not enable⁸ him to enjoy⁹ the fruit of his labor¹⁰ —

instead, someone else¹¹ enjoys¹² it!¹³

This is fruitless and a grave misfortune.¹⁴

(Ecc 6:3) Even if a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years —

even if he lives a long, long time,¹⁵ but cannot enjoy his prosperity —

even if he were to live forever¹⁶ —

I would say, "A stillborn child¹⁷ is better off than he is!"¹⁸
(Ecc 6:4) Though the stillborn child¹⁹ came into the world²⁰
for no reason²¹ and departed into darkness,
though its name is shrouded in darkness,²²
(Ecc 6:5) though it never saw the light of day²³ nor knew
anything,²⁴

yet it has more rest²⁵ than that man —
(Ecc 6:6) if he should live a thousand years twice, yet does
not enjoy his prosperity.

For both of them die!²⁶

(Ecc 6:7) All of man's labor is for nothing more than²⁷ to fill his stomach²⁸ —

yet his appetite²⁹ is never satisfied!

(Ecc 6:8) So what advantage does a wise man have over a fool?³⁰

And what advantage³¹ does a pauper gain by knowing how to survive?³²

(Ecc 6:9) It is better to be content with³³ what the eyes can see³⁴

than for one's heart always to crave more.³⁵

This continual longing³⁶ is futile — like³⁷ chasing the wind.

(Ecc 6:10) ***The Futile Way Life Works***

Whatever has happened was foreordained,³⁸

and what happens to a person³⁹ was also foreknown.

It is useless for him to argue with God about his fate

because God is more powerful than he is.⁴⁰

(Ecc 6:11) The more one argues with words, the less he accomplishes.⁴¹

How does that benefit him?⁴²

(Ecc 6:12) For no one knows what is best for a person during his life⁴³ —

during the few days of his fleeting life —

for⁴⁴ they pass away⁴⁵ like a shadow.

Nor can anyone tell him what the future will hold for him on earth.⁴⁶

(Ecc 7:1) ***Life is Brief and Death is Certain!***

A good reputation¹ is better² than precious³ perfume;⁴

likewise,⁵ the day of one's⁶ death⁷ is better than the day of one's birth.⁸

(Guzik)

Ecc 7:1-29

Ecclesiastes 7 - Trying to Find a Better Way

A. Looking at life through better and worse.

1. (Ecc_7:1-4) Better in life and death.

A good name *is* better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of one's birth;
Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that *is* the end of all men;
And the living will take *it* to heart.

Sorrow *is* better than laughter,

For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

a. A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death better than the day of one's birth: At the end of Ecclesiastes 6, the Preacher was in a mournful, discouraged mood as he considered the meaninglessness of life in a world without eternity and accountability in the world beyond. He continued that tone by coupling an obvious truth (a good name is better than precious ointment) with a more startling statement (the day of death better than the day of one's birth).

i. This comes from the deep and pained sense of meaninglessness that the Preacher suffered under. It made

him feel that death was better than life.

ii. “Nothing in the first half of verse 1 prepares us for the body-blow of the second half... Instead of reflecting and arguing, he will bombard us with proverbs, with their strong impact and varied angles of attack.” (Kidner) iii. Even the day of one’s birth is ominous, despite all the hopes and potential in a baby’s birth. Children come into the world uttering the *human sound* – a scream. “Before ever a child speak, he prophesies, by his tears, of his ensuing sorrows.” (Trapp)

iv. From a New Testament perspective, we have mixed feelings about the Preacher’s outburst, “The day of death better than the day of one’s birth.” On the one hand, the day of death *is* glorious for the believer – our battle is over, our sorrow is over, our uncertainty is over – and all things are new. On the other hand, we rejoice in the meaning God has given us with this life on earth. We agree with the Apostle Paul in Php_1:23 : *For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.*

v. “Death is the end of dying. On the day of the believer’s death dying is for ever done with. The saints who are with God shall never die any more. Life is wrestling, struggling; but death is the end of conflict: it is rest-victory.” (Spurgeon)

vi. “Hence all the ancient fathers called those days wherein the martyrs suffered their birthdays, because they began to live indeed.” (Trapp)

vii. “Consider it spiritually, and, dear brethren, what is a good name? A good name is a name that is written in the Lamb’s book of life, and that is better than the sweetest of all ointments.” (Spurgeon) b. Better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting: Solomon knew our tendency to simply *ignore* or *wish away* death. It is better to be squarely confronted with the reality of death, and the house of mourning is a fine place to take it to heart.

i. It seems that the Preacher has rejected his previous hope of finding the meaning of life in pleasure, accomplishment, and wisdom. Now there is only death, and one should not ignore it. *So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* (Psa_90:12) ii. "Some of the old Romish monks always read their Bibles with a candle stuck in a skull. The light from a death's head may be an awful one, but it is a very profitable one." (Spurgeon)

c. Sorrow is better than laughter: The Preacher goes against all intuition; who among us would say this? Yet he is determined to sweep away our illusions and wishes about the meaninglessness of life in his *under the sun* premise.

i. Rejecting Solomon's general premise, we do not believe that sorrow is *always* better than laughter. We do not reject it because we prefer an illusion or a wish; we do it out of firm confidence in a God to whom we answer in eternity, and who has promised to reward good and punish evil there. Even so – there *is* often more wisdom in the house of mourning than in the house of mirth.

2. (Ecc_7:5-9) Better in wisdom and folly.

It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise

Than for a man to hear the song of fools.

For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,

So *is* the laughter of the fool.

This also is vanity.

Surely oppression destroys a wise *man's* reason,

And a bribe debases the heart.

The end of a thing *is* better than its beginning;

The patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit.

Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,

For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

a. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools: The Preacher continues his previous thought, that man finds wisdom in adversity and suffering than in ease and comfort. The laughter of the fool

is nothing more than a momentary sound, leaving nothing of substance behind.

i. “The pun ‘Like the sound of *sirim* (thorns) under the *sir* (pot, cauldron)’ is caught by Moffatt’s *Like nettles crackling under kettles*. Thorns were a rapidly burning, easily extinguishable fuel in the ancient world.” (Eaton) ii. “They make a great noise, a great blaze; and are extinguished in a few moments. Such indeed, comparatively, are the joys of life; they are noisy, flashy, and transitory.” (Clarke)

iii. “Their laughter is also fitly compared to thorns, because it chokes good motions, scratcheth the conscience, harbours the vermin of base and baggage lusts.” (Trapp)

b. Surely oppression destroys a wise man’s reason: For all of Solomon’s praise of the instructive role of adversity, he also understood that suffering also had its limit. It could destroy a wise man’s reason.

c. Do not hasten your spirit to be angry: After two proverbs celebrating patience, the Preacher warns us against impatience leading to anger. Living with an *under the sun* premise may easily make a person impatient and then angry, and anger rests in the bosom of fools.

3. (Ecc_7:10-12) Wisdom gives perspective.

Do not say,

“Why were the former days better than these?”

For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

Wisdom *is* good with an inheritance,

And profitable to those who see the sun.

For wisdom *is* a defense *as* money *is* a defense, But the excellence of knowledge *is that* wisdom gives life to those who have it.

a. Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” Solomon understood our tendency to romanticize the past, and think that it was better than our current time. He cautioned against it, knowing that the meaninglessness of life with his *under the sun* premise is not a new phenomenon.

i. “The clear-eyed Qoheleth is the last person to be impressed by this golden haze around the past: he has already declared that one age is very much like another. ‘What has been is what will be, . . . and there is nothing new under the sun’ (Ecc_1:9).” (Kidner)

ii. “Even Christians sometimes overestimate the early church, the Reformation, or periods of revival. Wise people certainly learn from the past, but they live in the present with all its opportunities.” (Wright)

iii. “In former days men were wicked as they are now, and religion was unfashionable: God also is the same *now* as he was *then*; as just, as merciful, as ready to help: and there is no depravity in the age that will excuse your crimes, your follies, and your carelessness.” (Clarke)

b. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun: With the Preacher’s premise, the best kind of life is found with wisdom and money (an inheritance). This wisdom – called also excellence of knowledge – gives whatever life can be had in an *under the sun* world.

4. (Ecc_7:13-14) Wisdom in considering God.

Consider the work of God;

For who can make straight what He has made crooked?

In the day of prosperity be joyful,

But in the day of adversity consider:

Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other,

So that man can find out nothing *that will come* after him.

a. Consider the work of God; for who can make straight was He has made crooked? Understanding the relative place of man to God is important in peaceful acceptance with life *under the sun*. From the Preacher’s perspective, this has the sense of fatalism.

i. “There is no standing before a lion, no hoisting up a sail in a tempest, no contending with the Almighty.” (Trapp)

b. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Solomon counsels us how to take the good and the

bad of life into perspective. "Take what life gives you, and get along the best you can."

c. Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him: The Preacher here drifts again toward despair. Considering God's control of all things leads him to believe that the system is set so that we can know nothing of what is beyond us, of what will come after him.

B. Living a better life under the sun.

1. (Ecc_7:15-18) Dangers along the way.

I have seen everything in my days of vanity:

There is a just *man* who perishes in his righteousness, And there is a wicked *man* who prolongs *life* in his wickedness.

Do not be overly righteous,

Nor be overly wise:

Why should you destroy yourself?

Do not be overly wicked,

Nor be foolish:

Why should you die before your time?

It is good that you grasp this,

And also not remove your hand from the other;

For he who fears God will escape them all.

a. I have seen everything in my days of vanity: Solomon complained that in his meaningless life he has seen the good suffer (a just man who perishes in his righteousness) and the wicked prosper (prolongs his life in his wickedness). Solomon mourns, *it isn't fair*.

i. "The first man that died, died for religion. How early did martyrdom come into the world!" (Trapp) b. Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise . . . do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: In light of the apparent vanity of life, Solomon here recommended a *balanced* approach to living. Be righteous, but not too much; be wise, but not too much; be wicked, but not too much; be foolish, but not too much.

i. "Righteousness does not always pay. Wickedness sometimes does. Therefore morality is to be a thing of

calculation.” (Morgan)

ii. This is a common approach to life, thinking that everything is good in moderation. This has some truth to it, but does not define a wise or good life. We should remember that both Jesus and Paul (as well as many others) were not considered balanced individuals in their day. Their understanding of eternity and accountability made them – in the view of many – *unbalanced*.

2. (Ecc_7:19-22) The need of wisdom.

Wisdom strengthens the wise

More than ten rulers of the city.

For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.

Also do not take to heart everything people say,

Lest you hear your servant cursing you.

For many times, also, your own heart has known

That even you have cursed others.

a. Wisdom strengthens the wise: A wise man – even with an *under the sun* premise – will see and appreciate the value of wisdom, that it gives more strength than ten rulers of the city.

b. There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin: A wise man understands the sinfulness of man – and his own sinfulness.

c. Do not take to heart everything people say . . . even you have cursed others: Wisely, the Preacher knew that we tend to take the words of others about us too seriously. People often say unguarded things that are not deeply felt; *we* say such things about others and would not want them to take to heart what we said.

i. In his book *Lectures to My Students*, Charles Spurgeon gave a chapter to this verse, which he titled “The Blind Eye and the Deaf Ear.” In that chapter he gave wise advice to pastors and Christian workers that they should sometimes (if not often) simply overlook unkind and thoughtless things

others say and do. We would not want to be judged by our worst moments; we should not judge others by theirs.

ii. "The fact that we often speak ill of others should make us less open to take offence at what is said of ourselves, and prepared to expect unfavorable comments." (Deane)

3. (Ecc_7:23-25) Frustration in seeking wisdom.

All this I have proved by wisdom.

I said, "I will be wise";

But it *was* far from me.

As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep,

Who can find it out?

I applied my heart to know,

To search and seek out wisdom and the reason *of things*, To know the wickedness of folly,

Even of foolishness *and* madness.

a. All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me: As the Preacher gives wise advice for living, he understood that his desire to be wise was not always fulfilled with true wisdom.

i. "The honest admission of failure to find wisdom – of watching it in fact recede with every step one takes, discovering that none of our soundings ever gets to the bottom of things – this is, if not the beginning of wisdom, a good path to that beginning." (Kidner)

b. I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things: Given his *under the sun* premise, his meaningless life could not be made meaningful by the attainment of wisdom.

4. (Ecc_7:26-29) Searching for wisdom, the Preacher sees man's sinfulness.

And I find more bitter than death

The woman whose heart *is* snares and nets,

Whose hands *are* fetters.

He who pleases God shall escape from her,

But the sinner shall be trapped by her.

"Here is what I have found," says the Preacher,

“Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find:

One man among a thousand I have found,

But a woman among all these I have not found.

Truly, this only I have found:

That God made man upright,

But they have sought out many schemes.”

a. I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters: In his unsatisfying search for wisdom, Solomon understood that a woman could be a danger and a trap. It was important to not let that happen; he who pleases God shall escape from her.

i. But the sinner shall be trapped by her: “ ‘In her,’ in the snare which is herself.” (Deane) “The wanton woman, that shame of her sex. A bitch, Moses calls her (Deu_23:18).” (Trapp)

ii. Knowing Solomon wrote this, it makes us wish we knew more about *when* Solomon wrote this; at what point in his life. We know from 1Ki_11:4 : *For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God.* Surely, Solomon himself was caught in these snares and nets and fetters.

iii. Those who think that Ecclesiastes is the statement of Solomon’s repentance and evidence that he turned his heart back to *the Lord his God*, this section is Solomon’s way of saying, “I understood my error and turned from it.”

Those who are unsure of Solomon’s repentance will place the writing of Ecclesiastes earlier in his life.

iv. All in all it is a fascinating question, and one (in the mind of this writer) has no definitive answer: Was Solomon one who pleased God in escaping from this trap, or was he the sinner trapped by her?

b. I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found.

But a woman among all these I have not found: Solomon could find a rare man in a thousand with wisdom; but not

even one woman. This speaks more about Solomon's choice of female companionship than it does about the relative wisdom of men and women.

i. "His fruitless search for a woman he could trust may tell us as much about him and his approach, as about any of his acquaintances." (Kidner)

ii. "Such as he knew her to be in Oriental courts and homes, denied her proper position, degraded, uneducated, all natural affections crushed or underdeveloped, the plaything of her lord, to be flung aside at any moment. It is not surprising that Koheleth's impression of the female sex should be unfavorable." (Deane)

iii. "He found that a harem did not provide the appropriate companion for man. How much better he would have been with one good wife, such as he speaks of in Ecc_9:9 and Proverbs 31!" (Wright)

c. This only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes: Solomon understood that God made man without sin, but man has – since the time of Adam – sought out many schemes of sin and rebellion against God.

i. We take Solomon's statement "God made man upright" not to refer to each individual, but to as man was originally made, to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "He was created neither sinful, nor neutral, but *upright*, a word used of the state of the heart which is disposed to faithfulness or obedience." (Eaton)

ii. "Since futility was not the first word about our world, it no longer has to be the last." (Kidner)

(Ecc 7:2) It is better to go to a funeral⁹

than a feast.¹⁰

For death¹¹ is the destiny¹² of every person,¹³

and the living should¹⁴ take this¹⁵ to heart.
(Ecc 7:3) Sorrow¹⁶ is better than laughter,

because sober reflection¹⁷ is good for the heart.¹⁸
(Ecc 7:4) The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,

but the heart of fools is in the house of merrymaking.¹⁹
(Ecc 7:5) ***Frivolous Living Versus Wisdom***

It is better for a person to receive²⁰ a rebuke from those
who are wise²¹

than to listen to the song²² of fools.
(Ecc 7:6) For like the crackling of quick-burning thorns²³
under a cooking pot,
so is the laughter of the fool.

This kind of folly²⁴ also is useless.²⁵
(Ecc 7:7) ***Human Wisdom Overturned by Adversity***

Surely oppression²⁶ can turn a wise person into a fool;²⁷

likewise,²⁸ a bribe corrupts²⁹ the heart.³⁰
(Ecc 7:8) The end of a matter³¹ is better than its beginning;

likewise, patience³² is better than pride.³³
(Ecc 7:9) Do not let yourself be quickly provoked,³⁴

for anger resides in the lap³⁵ of fools.
(Ecc 7:10) Do not say, "Why were the old days better than
these days?"³⁶

for it is not wise to ask that.³⁷
(Ecc 7:11) ***Wisdom Can Lengthen One's Life***

Wisdom, like³⁸ an inheritance, is a good thing;

it benefits those who see the light of day.³⁹
(Ecc 7:12) For wisdom provides⁴⁰ protection,⁴¹

just as⁴² money provides protection.⁴³

But the advantage of knowledge is this:

Wisdom preserves the life⁴⁴ of its owner.

(Ecc 7:13) ***Wisdom Acknowledges God's Orchestration of Life***

Consider the work of God:

For who can make straight what he has bent?

(Ecc 7:14) In times of prosperity⁴⁵ be joyful,

but in times of adversity⁴⁶ consider this:

God has made one as well as the other,⁴⁷

so that no one can discover what the future holds.⁴⁸

(Ecc 7:15) ***Exceptions to the Law of Retribution***

During the days of my fleeting life⁴⁹ I have seen both⁵⁰ of these things:

Sometimes⁵¹ a righteous person dies prematurely⁵² in spite of⁵³ his righteousness,
and sometimes⁵⁴ a wicked person lives long⁵⁵ in spite of his evil deeds.

(Ecc 7:16) So do not be excessively righteous or excessively⁵⁶ wise;⁵⁷

otherwise⁵⁸ you might⁵⁹ be disappointed.⁶⁰
(Ecc 7:17) Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool;

otherwise⁶¹ you might die before your time.
(Ecc 7:18) It is best to take hold of one warning⁶² without letting go of the other warning;⁶³

for the one who fears God will follow⁶⁴ both warnings.⁶⁵
(Ecc 7:19) ***Wisdom Needed Because No One is Truly Righteous***

Wisdom gives a wise person more protection⁶⁶

than ten rulers in a city.
(Ecc 7:20) For⁶⁷ there is not one truly⁶⁸ righteous person on the earth

who continually does good and never sins.
(Ecc 7:21) Also, do not pay attention to everything that people⁶⁹ say;

otherwise,⁷⁰ you might even hear⁷¹ your servant cursing you.
(Ecc 7:22) For you know in your own heart⁷²

that you also have cursed others many times.
(Ecc 7:23) ***Human Wisdom is Limited***

I have examined all this by wisdom;

I said, "I am determined⁷³ to comprehend this"⁷⁴ — but it was beyond my grasp.⁷⁵

(Ecc 7:24) Whatever has happened is beyond human⁷⁶ understanding;⁷⁷

it is far deeper than anyone can fathom.⁷⁸

(Ecc 7:25) ***True Righteousness and Wisdom are Virtually Nonexistent***

I tried⁷⁹ to understand, examine, and comprehend⁸⁰

the role of⁸¹ wisdom in the scheme of things,⁸²

and to understand the stupidity of wickedness⁸³ and the insanity of folly.⁸⁴

(Ecc 7:26) I discovered this:⁸⁵

More bitter than death is the kind of⁸⁶ woman⁸⁷ who is like a hunter's snare;⁸⁸

her heart is like a hunter's net and her hands are like prison chains.

The man who pleases God escapes her,

but the sinner is captured by her.

(Ecc 7:27) The Teacher says:

I discovered this while trying to discover the scheme of things, item by item.

(Ecc 7:28) What I have continually sought, I have not found;

I have found only⁸⁹ one upright⁹⁰ man among a thousand,

but I have not found one upright woman among all of them.
(Ecc 7:29) This alone have I discovered: God made humankind upright,

but they have sought many evil schemes.
(Ecc 8:1) **Human Government Demonstrates Limitations of Wisdom**

Who is¹ a² wise person? Who knows the solution³ to a problem?⁴

A person's wisdom brightens his appearance,⁵ and softens⁶ his harsh countenance.⁷

(Guzik)

Ecc 8:1-17

Ecclesiastes 8 - Wisdom And Mystery

A. More good advice for life “under the sun”

1. (Ecc_8:1-4) Wisdom in obeying and honoring the king.

Who *is* like a wise *man*?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom makes his face shine,

And the sternness of his face is changed.

I say, “Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him.”

Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power;

And who may say to him, “What are you doing?”

a. Who is like a wise man? Solomon searched for a wise man, who knew the interpretation of a thing. Solomon knew that wisdom makes a man happier, even in an *under the sun*

premise (makes his face shine . . . the sternness of his face is changed).

i. “The shining *face* generally speaks of favour (cf. Num_6:25). Here it speaks of the wise man who is visibly gracious in his demeanour, and (as the next phrase says) whose gentleness is obvious in his facial expression.”

(Eaton)

b. Keep the king’s commandment for the sake of your oath to God: The Preacher understood what the Apostle Paul would later write in Romans 13 – that we should obey government authority as part of our obedience to God.

i. We do this primarily not to honor the king or government authority (though this is part of our obligation).

Primarily, we honor government authority for the sake of our oath to God. In a New Covenant context, we do it as part of our obedience to God.

ii. “You have sworn obedience to him; keep your oath, for the engagement was made in the *presence of God*. It appears that the Jewish princes and chiefs took an oath of fidelity to their kings. This appears to have been done to *David*, 2Sa_5:1-3; to *Joash*, 2Ki_11:17; and to *Solomon*, 1Ch_29:24.” (Clarke) iii. We can agree with Solomon’s advice here, from both an Old Testament and New Testament perspective. Yet one must say that it sounds self-serving coming from Solomon, who was a king himself.

iv. We also recognize that we are always to obey God rather than man if the two contradict (Act_4:19). “Many passages in the Old Testament witness to the limits which loyalty to God must set on courtly tact and submissiveness.” (Kidner)

c. Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say to him, “What are you doing?” This is a reason why it is wise to obey a king. Their power – though sometimes held unrighteously – makes it unwise to fail to keep the king’s commandment or show him respect.

i. This also makes us reflect on our obedience to God as the Great King. “If he be a King, then it is a solemn hazard to

your soul if you come short of the least of his commandments. Remember that one treason makes a traitor; one leak sinks a ship; one fly spoils the whole box of ointment. He that bought us with his blood deserves to be obeyed in all things with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.” (Spurgeon) 2. (Ecc_8:5-9) Reasons for wise living.

He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful;
And a wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment,
Because for every matter there is a time and judgment,
Though the misery of man increases greatly.

For he does not know what will happen;

So who can tell him when it will occur?

No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit,

And no one has power in the day of death.

There is no release from that war,

And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: *There is* a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

a. He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful: Good will come to those who obey and honor the king.

b. Because for every matter there is a time and judgment: Wisdom knows what Solomon first poetically explained in Ecc_3:1-8 – that there is a time and purpose for everything under heaven.

c. Though the misery of man increases greatly. For he does not know what will happen: The Preacher understood that for every matter there is a time and judgment; but he also knew that we don’t know what those times are. A wise man’s heart may discern both time and judgment, but certainly not perfectly; and not all are wise.

i. “The highest wisdom is submission to things as they are... Yet in doing all this there will abide in the heart the recognition of abounding injustice.” (Morgan)

d. No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death: If the lack of wisdom discouraged Solomon in Ecc_8:6-7, he found the powerlessness of man in the face of death to be yet more despairing.

Under the sun, he saw that death allows no winners, and there is no release from that war.

e. All this I have seen . . . there is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt: The Preacher knew that part of man's misery on this earth was to be ruled by others oppressively.

i. "This may be spoken of rulers generally, who, instead of *feeding, fleece the flock*; tyrants and oppressors, who come to an untimely end by their mismanagement of the offices of the state. All these things relate to *Asiatic* despots, and have ever been more applicable to *them* than to any other sovereigns in the world. They were despotic; they still are so." (Clarke)

B. Even wisdom doesn't answer the big questions.

1. (Ecc_8:10-13) Why are the deeds of the wicked soon forgotten?

Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also *is* vanity. Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times*, and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

a. I saw the wicked buried . . . they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: Solomon saw that the wicked die, and their evil is soon forgotten instead of being memorialized in infamy. With his *under the sun* premise,

Solomon despaired that *the wicked dead are not punished after death*.

i. "I have seen wicked men buried and as their friends returned from the cemetery, having forgotten all the dead man's evil deeds, these men were praised in the very city where they had committed their crimes!" (Living Bible) b. Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil: If wicked men are often not punished after death, they also are often not punished in this life. All this added to the sense of life's meaninglessness for Solomon.

i. This also speaks of the hardened response many make to the mercy and forbearance of God toward them. "Man's godless ingratitude is as deep a mystery as is God's loving patience. It is strange that, with such constant failure of His love to win, God should still persevere in it." (Maclaren)

c. I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked: In context, we can suppose that the Preacher said this as a hope or a wish, rather than with real confidence. He *wishes* this were true, but cannot have confidence that it is while clinging to his *under the sun* premise.

2. (Ecc_8:14) Why do the bad have it good and the good have it bad?

There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also *is* vanity.

a. There are just men to whom it happens according to the wicked: Solomon, speaking from his eternity-excluding viewpoint, felt this made life meaningless (vanity). Why do good men and women suffer?

i. This was the great question of the Book of Job, and almost unanswerable apart from a life that appreciates eternity and

our accountability in the world beyond.

b. Again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous: Perhaps even more of a problem to the Preacher was the question, “Why do wicked men seem to be blessed?” The strength of this question also made life seem meaningless (vanity).

i. One might say that this question is even more troublesome, because in a very real sense, there are no just men and all can be seen as wicked in some way. Why goodness is shown to the undeserving is a question that looks to the remarkable mercy of God.

3. (Ecc_8:15-17) Live for the moment – and know there is more than what you can see.

So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor *all* the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover *it*, yet he will not find *it*; moreover, though a wise *man* attempts to know *it*, he will not be able to find *it*.

a. So I commended enjoyment: With the meaninglessness of life so plain to the Preacher, all he could counsel was to make the best of a bad situation and enjoy life the best way possible.

b. Then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: Here Solomon begins to undermine his once-so-certain premise of life lived without an eternal perspective. He recognizes that man cannot find out the work of God in fullness; so what we see does not define what there actually is.

i. The business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night: “The very busyness of life worries us

into asking where it is taking us, and what it means, if it does mean anything. We hardly need Qoheleth to point out that this is very question that defeats us.” (Kidner)

ii. He will not be able to find it: “His conclusion is that we must be content not to know everything. Neither hard work (*toil*), persistent endeavour (*seeking*), skill or experience (*wisdom*) will unravel the mystery. Wise men may make excessive claims; they too will be baffled.” (Eaton) (Ecc 8:2) Obey the king's command,⁸

because you took⁹ an oath before God¹⁰ to be loyal to him.¹¹

(Ecc 8:3) Do not rush out of the king's presence in haste — do not delay when the matter is unpleasant,¹²

for he can do whatever he pleases.

(Ecc 8:4) Surely the king's authority¹³ is absolute;¹⁴

no one can say¹⁵ to him, "What are you doing?"

(Ecc 8:5) Whoever obeys his¹⁶ command will not experience harm,

and a wise person¹⁷ knows the proper time¹⁸ and procedure.

(Ecc 8:6) For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter,

for the oppression¹⁹ of the king²⁰ is severe upon his victim.²¹

(Ecc 8:7) Surely no one knows the future,²²

and no one can tell another person what will happen.²³

(Ecc 8:8) Just as no one has power over the wind to restrain it,²⁴

so no one has power over the day of his²⁵ death.

Just as no one can be discharged during the battle,²⁶

so wickedness cannot rescue the wicked.²⁷

(Ecc 8:9) While applying²⁸ my mind²⁹ to everything³⁰ that happens in this world,³¹ I have seen all this:

Sometimes one person³² dominates³³ other people³⁴ to their harm.³⁵

(Ecc 8:10) ***Contradictions to the Law of Retribution***

Not only that,³⁶ but I have seen the wicked approaching³⁷ and entering the temple,³⁸

and as they left the holy temple,³⁹ they

boasted⁴⁰ in the city that they had done so.

This also is an enigma.⁴¹

(Ecc 8:11) When⁴² a sentence⁴³ is not executed⁴⁴ at once against a crime,⁴⁵

the human heart⁴⁶ is encouraged to do evil.⁴⁷

(Ecc 8:12) Even though a sinner might commit a hundred crimes⁴⁸ and still live a long time,⁴⁹

yet I know that it will go well with God-fearing people⁵⁰ — for they stand in fear⁵¹ before him.

(Ecc 8:13) But it will not go well with the wicked,

nor will they⁵² prolong their⁵³ days like a shadow,⁵⁴

because they⁵⁵ do not stand in fear⁵⁶ before God.

(Ecc 8:14) Here is⁵⁷ another⁵⁸ enigma⁵⁹ that occurs on earth:

Sometimes there are righteous people who get what the wicked deserve,⁶⁰

and sometimes there are wicked people who get what the righteous deserve.⁶¹

I said, "This also is an enigma."

(Ecc 8:15) ***Enjoy Life In Spite of Its Injustices***

So I recommend the enjoyment of life,⁶²

for there is nothing better on earth⁶³ for a person to do⁶⁴ except⁶⁵ to eat, drink, and enjoy⁶⁶ life.⁶⁷

So⁶⁸ joy⁶⁹ will accompany him in his toil

during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.⁷⁰

(Ecc 8:16) ***Limitations of Human Wisdom***

When I tried⁷¹ to gain⁷² wisdom

and to observe the activity⁷³ on earth —

even though it prevents anyone from sleeping day or night⁷⁴ —

(Ecc 8:17) then I discerned all that God has done:⁷⁵

No one really comprehends what happens⁷⁶ on earth.⁷⁷

Despite all human⁷⁸ efforts to discover it, no one can ever grasp⁷⁹ it.⁸⁰

Even if⁸¹ a wise person claimed⁸² that he understood,

he would not really comprehend⁸³ it.⁸⁴

(Ecc 9:1) ***Everyone Will Die***

So I reflected on all this,¹ attempting to clear² it all up.

I concluded that³ the righteous and the wise, as well as their works, are in the hand of God;

whether a person will be loved or hated⁴ —

no one knows what lies ahead.⁵

(Guzik)

Ecc 9:1-18

Ecclesiastes 9 - The Best Way To Live Under The Sun

A. In light of death, live life and make the best of a bad thing.

1. (Ecc_9:1-6) The despair of death: the same thing happens to everyone.

For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works *are* in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred *by* anything *they see* before them. All things *come* alike to all: One event *happens* to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean;

To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.

As is the good, so *is* the sinner;

He who takes an oath as *he* who fears an oath.

This *is* an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing *happens* to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness *is* in their hearts while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead. But for him who is joined to

all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

For the living know that they will die;

But the dead know nothing,

And they have no more reward,

For the memory of them is forgotten.

Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished;

Nevermore will they have a share

In anything done under the sun.

a. The righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. . . . All things come alike to all: With his *under the sun* premise – excluding any sense of eternity or accountability in a life to come – man can know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them. Creation can tell us God is; it doesn't tell us very well that God loves us.

i. "We have only to use our eyes without prejudice, according to Psalms 19 and Rom_1:19 ff., to see that there is a powerful and glorious Creator. But it takes more than observation to discover how He is disposed towards us."

(Kidner)

ii. Seeing beyond this *under the sun* perspective, we can say that we should not measure God's love by what happens in life. We measure God's love by what Jesus did at the cross.

ii. The Preacher has once again allowed his thoughts of God's sovereign power (in the hand of God) to develop into fatalism (all things come alike to all). The thought process may go like this: "I know God rules over all things."

Then, "It seems that the same thing happens to all; all die without real meaning revealed for their life." Finally, "The all powerful God means it to be this way."

b. One event happens to the righteous and the wicked . . . as is the good, so is the sinner: This develops Solomon's idea that all share the destiny in this meaningless life of ours. This is certainly how things *appeared* to Solomon with his *under the sun* premise.

c. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: Speaking from his premise, the Preacher *says* that all have the same fate, but *he does not like it*. It's wrong that one event happens to the righteous and the wicked.

i. "To all appearances, God is just not interested. The things that are supposed to matter most to Him turn out to make no difference – or none that anyone can see – to the way we are disposed of in the end. Moral or immoral, religious or profane, we are all mown down alike." (Kidner)

d. For him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion: This makes perfect sense from an *under the sun* perspective. If all existence and consciousness ends with death, then the *only* thing that matters is this present life (and therefore nothing really matters).

e. The dead know nothing . . . Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun: With great poetic effect, Solomon puts forth the belief that all existence and consciousness end with this life.

2. (Ecc_9:7-10) With such a view of life and death, joy is only found in the moment.

Go, eat your bread with joy,
And drink your wine with a merry heart;
For God has already accepted your works.
Let your garments always be white,
And let your head lack no oil.

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that *is* your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

a. Go, eat your bread with joy: From outside of his *under the sun* premise, we see a touch of humor in the Preacher's analysis. "Life is utterly meaningless and our common death

and destiny prove it to be so. So forget about all I have said and have a good time.” It is small hope given to despairing men and women, but it is the best he can do.

b. For God has already accepted your works: Given the recent emphasis on the sovereign power of God (Ecc_7:13; Ecc_9:1), we sense both fatalism and wishing in this statement. Perhaps the sense is, “God has already accepted your works – *I hope*; because if He hasn’t, there is nothing you can do about it.”

c. Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity: Clearly, Solomon knew that enjoying the good things at hand in this life – bread, wine, garments, comforts (let your head lack no oil), and a wife whom you love – none of these took away the meaninglessness of life. “Make your vain life a little better,” he counseled.

i. “*White garments* and anointing *oil* make life more comfortable in a hot climate.” (Eaton) ii. “The demands of marriage include the giving of affection (*whom you love*; cf. Eph_5:25), the active quest for enjoyment (*Enjoy life*, rsv), a life-long (*all...your...life*) encouragement amid the responsibilities and duties of life (*in all your toil at which you toil*).” (Eaton) d. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going: The Preacher continued to give advice meant to make the best of the bad situation of life under the sun.

i. In the 1960s there was a beer commercial where the announcer said something like this: “You only go around once in life, so you’ve got to grab for all the gusto you can.” The ad writers for Schlitz beer could have properly given credit to Solomon for the idea.

ii. We can apply the attitude reflected in Ecc_9:10 to our present service for God, and do it with your might. “No man ever served God by doing things tomorrow.” (Spurgeon)

iii. “Man was not created to be idle, he was not elected to be idle, he was not redeemed to be idle, he was not quickened to be idle, and he is not sanctified by God’s grace to be idle.” (Spurgeon) 3. (Ecc_9:11-12) Time and chance make life under the sun hard to understand.

I returned and saw under the sun that—

The race *is* not to the swift,

Nor the battle to the strong,

Nor bread to the wise,

Nor riches to men of understanding,

Nor favor to men of skill;

But time and chance happen to them all.

For man also does not know his time:

Like fish taken in a cruel net,

Like birds caught in a snare,

So the sons of men *are* snared in an evil time,

When it falls suddenly upon them.

a. I returned and saw under the sun that – the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong: Solomon wondered, “If this life is all there is, then why doesn’t this life make more sense?” In a world that made more sense under the sun, then the swift would always win the race and the strong would always win the battle. Yet it doesn’t always work that way.

b. But time and chance happen to them all: The Preacher again struggles against a sense of fatalism. In his somewhat contradictory way, the one who previously proclaimed God’s management of all (Ecc_7:13 and Ecc_9:1) now wondered if it didn’t all happen according to time and chance.

i. “*Time and chance* are paired, no doubt because they both have a way of taking matters suddenly out of our hands.” (Kidner)

c. The sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them: From his under the sun perspective, it seemed that man was more subject to the whims of time and chance than of a loving, all-powerful God.

B. Unappreciated wisdom.

1. (Ecc_9:13-15) Wisdom unrecognized.

This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it *seemed* great to me: *There was* a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

a. A poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city: Solomon tells a story about a poor wise man whose wisdom saved a city against the siege of a great king. This seemed great to Solomon; it was a wonderful and significant display of wisdom.

b. Yet no one remembered that same poor man: Under the premise that death ends existence and consciousness for all, Solomon protested that the only lasting meaning this man might have – to be remembered – was taken away. The almost unbelievable fleetingness of fame added to the sense of meaninglessness of life.

i. Men quickly forget, but God never does. He knows those who are His (2Ti_2:19). He has a book of remembrance before Him for those that fear the Lord (Mal_3:16), and their names are written in heaven (Luk_10:20).

2. (Ecc_9:16-18) Wisdom thwarted.

Then I said:

“Wisdom *is* better than strength.

Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom *is* despised,

And his words are not heard.

Words of the wise, *spoken* quietly, *should be* heard Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.

Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war;

But one sinner destroys much good.”

a. Wisdom is better than strength: The Preacher knew that even though wisdom is not appreciated and it is ultimately vain, it was still better than strength.

b. Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools: *Because* wisdom is superior, it should be heard above the shouts of the foolish – even though wisdom will often be unappreciated.

i. “The Preacher continues to emphasize the ease with which wisdom is counteracted.” (Eaton) c. Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good: Wisdom is better – better than strength (weapons of war), better than foolishness – but all the good that wisdom does can quickly be taken away by one sinner who destroys much good.

i. Solomon sensed that it was much easier to destroy than to build. Establishing things by wisdom is much more difficult than destroying them by the work of even one sinner.

ii. “Adam’s sin infected the whole race of man; Achan’s transgression caused Israel’s defeat (Jos_7:11-12); Rehoboam’s folly occasioned the great schism (1Ki_12:16).” (Deane)

(Ecc 9:2) Everyone shares the same fate⁶ —

the righteous and the wicked,

the good and the bad,⁷

the ceremonially clean and unclean,

those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

What happens to the good person, also happens to the sinner;⁸

what happens to those who make vows, also happens to those who are afraid to make vows.

(Ecc 9:3) This is the unfortunate fact⁹ about everything that happens on earth:¹⁰

the same fate awaits¹¹ everyone.

In addition to this, the hearts of all people¹² are full of evil,

and there is folly in their hearts during their lives — then they die.¹³

(Ecc 9:4) ***Better to Be Poor but Alive than Rich but Dead***

But whoever is among¹⁴ the living¹⁵ has hope;

a live dog is better than a dead lion.

(Ecc 9:5) For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything;

they have no further reward — and even the memory of them disappears.¹⁶

(Ecc 9:6) What they loved,¹⁷ as well as what they hated¹⁸ and envied,¹⁹ perished long ago, and they no longer have a part in anything that happens on earth.²⁰

(Ecc 9:7) ***Life is Brief, so Cherish its Joys***

Go, eat your food²¹ with joy,

and drink your wine with a happy heart,

because God has already approved your works.

(Ecc 9:8) Let your clothes always be white,

and do not spare precious ointment on your head.

(Ecc 9:9) Enjoy²² life with your beloved wife²³ during all the days of your fleeting²⁴ life that God²⁵ has given you on earth²⁶ during all your fleeting days;²⁷

for that is your reward in life and in your burdensome work²⁸ on earth.²⁹

(Ecc 9:10) Whatever you find to do with your hands,³⁰

do it with all your might,

because there is neither work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave,³¹

the place where you will eventually go.³²

(Ecc 9:11) ***Wisdom Cannot Protect against Seemingly Chance Events***

Again,³³ I observed this on the earth:³⁴

the race is not always³⁵ won by the swiftest,

the battle is not always won by the strongest;

prosperity³⁶ does not always belong to those who are the wisest,

wealth does not always belong to those who are the most discerning,

nor does success³⁷ always come to those with the most knowledge —

for time and chance may overcome³⁸ them all.
(Ecc 9:12) Surely, no one³⁹ knows his appointed time!⁴⁰

Like fish that are caught in a deadly⁴¹ net, and like birds that are caught in a snare —
just like them, all people⁴² are ensnared⁴³ at an unfortunate⁴⁴ time that falls upon them suddenly.
(Ecc 9:13) ***Most People Are Not Receptive to Wise Counsel***

This is what I also observed about wisdom on earth,⁴⁵

and it is a great burden⁴⁶ to me:
(Ecc 9:14) There was once⁴⁷ a small city with a few men in it,

and a mighty king attacked it, besieging⁴⁸ it and building strong⁴⁹ siege works against it.

(Ecc 9:15) However, a poor but wise man lived in the city,⁵⁰

and he could have delivered⁵¹ the city by his wisdom,

but no one listened⁵² to that poor man.

(Ecc 9:16) So I concluded that wisdom is better than might,⁵³

but a poor man's wisdom is despised; no one ever listens⁵⁴
to his advice.⁵⁵

(Ecc 9:17) ***Wisdom versus Fools, Sin, and Folly***

The words of the wise are heard in quiet,

more than the shouting of a ruler is heard⁵⁶ among fools.

(Ecc 9:18) Wisdom is better than weapons of war,

but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

(Ecc 10:1) One dead fly¹ makes the perfumer's ointment
give off a rancid stench,²

so a little folly can outweigh³ much wisdom.⁴

(Guzik)

Ecc 10:1-20

Ecclesiastes 10 - Folly and Wisdom

A. The disgrace of foolishness.

1. (Ecc_10:1) Foolishness disgraces a wise man's honor.

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment,

And cause it to give off a foul odor;

So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor.

a. Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment: Solomon here followed a familiar form in stating proverbs. An obvious statement is made: that dead flies spoil a fine ointment and cause it to smell.

i. "This is a metaphorical confirmation of the truth enunciated at the end of the last chapter, 'One sinner destroyeth much good.'" (Deane)

b. So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor: Even as small dead flies – quite little in proportion to the whole – spoil a fine ointment, so just a little folly spoils the reputation of someone regarded as wise and honorable.

i. “There are endless instances of prizes forfeited and good beginning marred in a single reckless moment – not only by the irresponsible, such as Esau, but by the sorely tried, such as Moses and Aaron.” (Kidner) ii. The Preacher is beginning to direct his arguments in the intended direction. To use the metaphor of a ship, he has sailed in many different directions to show us the meaninglessness of life. Now, still out of sight of land, he begins to tack his direction towards meaning and truth. Ecc_10:1 reminds us that *even small things have consequences*.

2. (Ecc_10:2-3) Foolishness can’t be hidden.

A wise man’s heart *is* at his right hand,

But a fool’s heart at his left.

Even when a fool walks along the way,

He lacks wisdom,

And he shows everyone *that* he *is* a fool.

a. A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart at his left: Since the right hand was regarded as the side of strength, skill, and favor, the wise man’s heart is known and a strength to him. This is not true of the fool, whose heart is at his left.

i. “ ‘Right’ and ‘left’ are natural symbols for the strong and good, one the one hand, and for the weak and bad, on the other hand ... The Latin word *sinister* means ‘left.’ ” (Wright)

ii. “To have one’s *heart at his left side* is to have the ‘springs of life’ (Pro_4:23) located in the realm of practical and spiritual incompetence.” (Eaton) b. He shows everyone that he is a fool: The foolish man (or woman) has a way of making their folly evident. As Jesus would later say, *wisdom is justified by all her children* (Luk_7:25). Wisdom and folly become obvious in life.

3. (Ecc_10:4-7) Foolishness in high places.

If the spirit of the ruler rises against you,

Do not leave your post;

For conciliation pacifies great offenses.

There is an evil I have seen under the sun,

As an error proceeding from the ruler:

Folly is set in great dignity,

While the rich sit in a lowly place.

I have seen servants on horses,

While princes walk on the ground like servants.

a. If the spirit of the ruler rises against you: The idea seems to be, “Even in a difficult situation, don’t leave your post. Be faithful to your position and you will find that conciliation pacifies great offenses.”

b. Folly is set in dignity ... I have seen servants on horses: The Preacher wanted to remind us that *not all is fair in this life*.

Foolish men are promoted or accepted to positions of great leadership. Some lowly men are unwisely exalted (servants on horses) while some noblemen are humbled (princes walk on the ground like servants).

B. Evidence of folly and wisdom.

1. (Ecc_10:8-10) Foolishness in action.

He who digs a pit will fall into it,

And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

He who quarries stones may be hurt by them,

And he who splits wood may be endangered by it.

If the ax is dull,

And one does not sharpen the edge,

Then he must use more strength;

But wisdom brings success.

a. He who digs a pit will fall into it: Solomon listed several examples of those who did wrong or foolish things and then suffered because of it.

i. “While spoiling his neighbour's property, he himself may come to greater mischief.” (Clarke) ii. Alexander Maclaren made a spiritual application of the idea, whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent: “Whoso pulls down the wall of temperance, a serpent will bite him. Trembling hands, broken constitutions, ruined reputations,

vanished ambitions, wasted lives, poverty, shame, and enfeebled will, death – these are the serpents that bite, in many cases, the transgressor.”

b. If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success: The fool will continue to use a dull ax, instead of being wise and sharpening the edge. The fool doesn’t wisely consider the future, and how wise use of one’s time in the present can make for a much better future.

i. F.B. Meyer made a helpful application to the Christian worker of this by analogy: “There are times with all who work for God, when they are blunt, through much usage At all such times let us turn to God and say, ‘Put in more strength. Let thy power be magnified in my weakness. Give more grace, so that thy work shall not suffer’

Surely more work is done by a blunt edge and divine power, than by a sharp edge and little power.”

2. (Ecc_10:11-14) The babbling talk of the foolish.

A serpent may bite when *it is* not charmed;

The babbler is no different.

The words of a wise man’s mouth *are* gracious,

But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;

The words of his mouth begin with foolishness,

And the end of his talk *is* raving madness.

A fool also multiplies words.

No man knows what is to be;

Who can tell him what will be after him?

a. A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different: A dangerous as a biting serpent is the one who talks – babbles – like a fool. Though the words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious, the lips of a fool shall swallow him up.

b. A fool also multiplies words ... who can tell him what will be after him? The fool is known by his many words, and by his presumption about the future – when no man knows what is to be.

i. “The word for ‘fool’ here is *sakal*, which implies a dense, confused thinker.” (Deane) ii. Previously the Preacher had confidently stated that there is nothing beyond this life, and that this life should be lived with an *under the sun* premise. He now casts more doubt upon that premise.

3. (Ecc_10:15) The fool at work.

The labor of fools wearies them,

For they do not even know how to go to the city!

a. The labor of fools wearies them: The fool has no desire to work; or when they do they quickly become wearied. They can’t see that it is *wise to work now in order to prepare for the future*.

b. They do not even know how to go to the city! The Preacher continued to subtly back away from his previous *under the sun* premise. The fool has no sense of direction or goal. They live their life as if it were meaningless, directionless.

i. “The phrase, ‘how to go to the city,’ seems to be a kind of proverbial comparison for anything that is very plain and conspicuous.” (Maclaren)

ii. “In a fine note of sarcasm, this proverb says that a person may be so involved in arguing about the universe that he misses what the ordinary person is concerned about, namely, finding the way home.” (Wright) iii. “To be ever learning, never arriving, as 2Ti_3:7 portrays some people, is to be a trifler who contrives to get lost on even the straightest *way to the city*. That is folly without even the excuse of ignorance.” (Kidner) 4. (Ecc_10:16-20) How foolishness corrupts a nation.

Woe to you, O land, when your king *is* a child,

And your princes feast in the morning!

Blessed *are* you, O land, when your king *is* the son of nobles,
And your princes feast at the proper time— For strength and not for drunkenness!

Because of laziness the building decays,

And through idleness of hands the house leaks.

A feast is made for laughter,
And wine makes merry;
But money answers everything.
Do not curse the king, even in your thought;
Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom;
For a bird of the air may carry your voice,
And a bird in flight may tell the matter.

a. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child: Solomon himself felt that he was but a child when he came to the throne of Israel; therefore he wisely asked God for the wisdom to lead a great people (1Ki_3:7-9).

i. "A nation's first need is a mature leader. *rsv is a child* refers to age but to general maturity." (Eaton) b. Woe to you, O land ... Blessed are you, O land: The Preacher understood that a land was blessed by good, faithful leaders, but cursed under wicked and incompetent leaders.

i. Because of laziness the building decays: "Lazy rulers bring down the great house of the nation, as a lazy householder lets the beams of his house collapse so that the roof sags and lets in the rain." (Wright) ii. If Ecc_10:18 pictures the fall of a nation, the following lines give the *reason* for fall - leaders who are foolish, selfish, and concerned only for their own pleasure and good.

iii. "They do nothing in order; turn night into day, and day into night; sleep when they should wake, and wake when they should sleep; attending more to chamberings and banquetings, than to the concerns of the state." (Clarke) c. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything: Solomon here spoke in the voice of a wicked, unwise king. Along this line, he counseled his readers to not curse the king lest they be found out.

i. "Kings have long ears, heavy hands; walls also and hedges have ears." (Trapp) ii. " 'A little bird told me' is a proverb which appears in a variety of forms and cultures, including Aristophanes' *The Birds* and the Hittite *Take of Elkuhirsu*." (Eaton) iii. The thought is suggestive. A king may hear of my

wrongdoing and I may suffer because of it, even though I did not know he could learn of it. *The same is true of my wrongdoing before God.*

(Ecc 10:2) ***Wisdom Can Be Nullified By the Caprice of Rulers***

A wise person's good sense protects him,⁵

but a fool's lack of sense leaves him vulnerable.⁶

(Ecc 10:3) Even when a fool walks along the road he lacks sense,⁷

and shows⁸ everyone what a fool he is.⁹

(Ecc 10:4) If the anger¹⁰ of the ruler flares up¹¹ against you, do not resign¹² from your position,¹³

for a calm¹⁴ response¹⁵ can undo¹⁶ great offenses.

(Ecc 10:5) I have seen another¹⁷ misfortune¹⁸ on the earth:¹⁹

It is an error a ruler makes.²⁰

(Ecc 10:6) Fools²¹ are placed in many positions of authority,²²

while wealthy men sit in lowly positions.

(Ecc 10:7) I have seen slaves²³ on horseback

and princes walking on foot²⁴ like slaves.

(Ecc 10:8) ***Wisdom is Needed to Avert Dangers in Everyday Life***

One who digs a pit may²⁵ fall into it,

and one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.²⁶

(Ecc 10:9) One who quarries stones may be injured by them;

one who splits logs may be endangered by them.

(Ecc 10:10) If an iron axhead²⁷ is blunt and a workman²⁸ does not sharpen²⁹ its edge,³⁰

he must exert a great deal of effort;³¹

so wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

(Ecc 10:11) If the snake should bite before it is charmed,³²

the snake charmer³³ is in trouble.³⁴

(Ecc 10:12) ***Words and Works of Wise Men and Fools***

The words of a wise person³⁵ win him³⁶ favor,³⁷

but the words³⁸ of a fool are self-destructive.³⁹

(Ecc 10:13) At the beginning his words⁴⁰ are foolish

and at the end⁴¹ his talk⁴² is wicked madness,⁴³

(Ecc 10:14) yet a fool keeps on babbling.⁴⁴

No one knows what will happen;

who can tell him what will happen in the future?⁴⁵

(Ecc 10:15) The toil of a stupid fool⁴⁶ wears him out,⁴⁷

because he does not even know the way to the city.⁴⁸

(Ecc 10:16) ***The Problem with Foolish Rulers***

Woe to you, O land, when your king is childish,⁴⁹

and your princes feast in the morning!
(Ecc 10:17) Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobility,⁵⁰

and your princes feast at the proper time⁵¹ — with self-control and not in drunkenness.⁵²
(Ecc 10:18) Because of laziness the roof⁵³ caves in,

and because of idle hands⁵⁴ the house leaks.
(Ecc 10:19) Feasts⁵⁵ are made⁵⁶ for laughter,

and wine makes life merry,⁵⁷

but money is the answer⁵⁸ for everything.
(Ecc 10:20) Do not curse a king even in your thoughts,

and do not curse the rich⁵⁹ while in your bedroom;⁶⁰

for a bird⁶¹ might report what you are thinking,⁶²

or some winged creature⁶³ might repeat your⁶⁴ words.⁶⁵
(Ecc 11:1) ***Ignorance of the Future Demands Diligence in the Present***

Send¹ your grain² overseas,³

for after many days you will get a return.⁴
(Guzik)

Ecc 11:1-8

Ecclesiastes 11 - Towards True Wisdom

A. Looking beyond what can be seen.

1. (Ecc_11:1-2) Working for a profit that can't be immediately seen.

Cast your bread upon the waters,

For you will find it after many days.

Give a serving to seven, and also to eight,

For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

a. Cast your bread upon the waters: This probably refers to a shipping venture that required great patience for the return of the investment. The idea is that it was wise and good to work for a return that could not be immediately seen.

i. "The allusion is to the element of trust in much ancient business. Ships on commercial voyages might be long delayed before any profit resulted." (Eaton)

ii. Some commentators (Trapp, Clarke, and others) think this speaks of generosity. Cast your bread upon the waters is to them a way of saying, "Give your material things to the needy in a way that might seem wasteful – as wasteful as throwing bread upon the waters, and you will be rewarded." If this is the sense, the point is much the same: do something now for a reward that cannot be immediately seen.

b. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth: The Preacher counseled generosity and did so in light that the future – though uncertain – must be prepared for. With these ideas he continues to direct us towards the place of true wisdom.

i. " 'Give a portion to seven' is advice to use all opportunity speculatively, because one does not know what calamities may be ahead, and because it is well to have provided beforehand for such contingencies." (Morgan) 2. (Ecc_11:3-4) Cause, effect, and the limits of analysis.

If the clouds are full of rain,

They empty *themselves* upon the earth;

And if a tree falls to the south or the north,

In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

He who observes the wind will not sow,

And he who regards the clouds will not reap.

a. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: With these proverbs Solomon emphasized the

idea of cause and effect. This principle alone directs us toward eternity, because the wickedness or goodness of man in this earthly life is often not answered in this life. The necessary effect from that cause must be realized in eternity.

i. Clouds are designed to be full of rain, and therefore to empty themselves upon the earth. For Spurgeon, this idea of design and what comes from it suggested the work of Jesus for us: "Now, dear heart, if thou believest Christ to be a cloud that is full of rain, for what reason is he full? Why, that he may empty himself upon the earth. There was no need that he should be a man full of sympathy except to sympathize with mourning men and women. There was no need that he should bleed except that he might bleed for you. There was no necessity that he should die except that the power of his death might deliver you from death."

ii. In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie: "Jerome's strange interpretation of the fallen tree has persisted, and some Christians have quoted it out of context. The tree, he said, is the dead person, and his destiny is fixed at death. But while this is true enough, it cannot be proved from this verse." (Wright) b. He who observes the wind will not sow: The farmer who is overly analytical about the wind or the clouds will never plant his fields, and thus he will not reap. The Preacher gently pushes us away from an overly analytical approach to life.

i. "If we are always waiting for favouring conditions, we shall resemble the farmer who is ever looking out for perfect weather, and lets the whole autumn pass without one handful of grain reaching the furrows." (Meyer) ii. "If we keep on observing circumstances, instead of trusting God, we shall be guilty of *disobedience*. God bids me sow: I do not sow, because the wind would blow some of my seed away. God bids me reap: I do not reap, because there is a black cloud there, and before I can house the harvest, some of it

may be spoiled. I may say what I like; but I am guilty of disobedience.” (Spurgeon)

iii. Spurgeon went on in that sermon (*Sowing in the Wind, Reaping Under Clouds*) to describe other ways that this attitude sins against God and man. To observe circumstances instead of trusting God shows *unbelief, rebellion, foolish fear, and idleness*.

B. Moving towards real wisdom, through fits and starts.

1. (Ecc_11:5) The limitations of knowledge.

As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind,

Or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child,
So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

a. As you do not know what is the way of the wind: Solomon again reminds us of the limitations of human knowledge. We don't know the way of the wind or how the bones grow in the womb of a mother.

i. “Thus at this point in his closing appeal the Preacher simply insists on a fact: certain aspects of God's working on earth defy explanation. The mystery which shrouds our very origin underlies the whole of reality.” (Eaton) ii. As Jesus would later say, *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit* (Joh_3:8).

b. So you do not know the works of God who makes everything: In the same way we don't know the hidden things, we also do not know the works of God in any comprehensive way. The Preacher brings us to a place of humility and submission to God and His works that again pushes us out of the previously entrenched *under the sun* premise.

2. (Ecc_11:6) Sowing seed with more trust than certainty.

In the morning sow your seed,

And in the evening do not withhold your hand;

For you do not know which will prosper,

Either this or that,

Or whether both alike *will be* good.

a. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand: Using agricultural images, the Preacher tells us to do work of all kinds – the work one would do in the morning, and the work one would do in the evening.

i. “Some commentators have taken *Sow your seed* to refer to the begetting of children following the Talmud and Midrash, but this is hardly suitable to the context.” (Eaton)

b. For you do not know which will prosper: Solomon again pushes towards an appropriately humble loss of self-confidence. *We should* give ourselves to all kinds of work, because we do not know the results. We know less of the future than we think we do; this shakes the previously assured *under the sun* premise.

3. (Ecc_11:7-8) A final flirtation with the *under the sun* premise.

Truly the light is sweet,

And *it is* pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; But if a man lives many years

And rejoices in them all,

Yet let him remember the days of darkness,

For they will be many.

All that is coming *is* vanity.

a. Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun: After repeatedly arguing from the premise expressed by the phrase *under the sun*, the Preacher now gives a last glance recognizing this thought before coming to his conclusions.

b. Yet let him remember the days of darkness: The sun gives light, but the *under the sun* premise seemed to bring the Preacher (and us) into days of darkness; and if lived under that premise, those dark days will be many and there will be much vanity to come.

(Ecc 11:2) Divide your merchandise⁵ among seven or even eight⁶ investments,⁷

for you do not know⁸ what calamity⁹ may happen on earth.
(Ecc 11:3) If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty
themselves on the earth,
and whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, the tree
will lie wherever it falls.
(Ecc 11:4) He who watches the wind will not sow,

and he who observes the clouds will not reap.¹⁰
(Ecc 11:5) Just as you do not know the path¹¹ of the wind,

or how the bones form¹² in the womb of a pregnant
woman,¹³

so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.
(Ecc 11:6) Sow your seed in the morning,

and do not stop working¹⁴ until the evening;¹⁵

for you do not know which activity¹⁶ will succeed¹⁷ —

whether this one or that one, or whether both will prosper
equally.¹⁸

(Ecc 11:7) ***Life Should Be Enjoyed Because Death is
Inevitable***

Light¹⁹ is sweet,²⁰

and it is pleasant for a person²¹ to see the sun.²²
(Ecc 11:8) So, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in
them all,

but let him remember that the days of darkness²³ will be
many — all that is about to come is obscure.²⁴

(Ecc 11:9) ***Enjoy Life to the Fullest under the Fear of God***

Rejoice, young man, while you are young,²⁵

and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.

Follow the impulses²⁶ of your heart and the desires²⁷ of your eyes,

but know that God will judge your motives and actions.²⁸
(Guzik)

Ecc 11:9-12:14

Ecclesiastes 12 - The Conclusion Of The Matter

A. Life in light of eternity.

1. (Ecc_11:9 to Ecc_11:10) Even in youth, remember that judgment will one day come.

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,

And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth;

Walk in the ways of your heart,

And in the sight of your eyes;

But know that for all these

God will bring you into judgment.

Therefore remove sorrow from your heart,

And put away evil from your flesh,

For childhood and youth *are* vanity.

a. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth: Perhaps this argued that Solomon now looked back from old age to the days of his youth, before an *under the sun* premise took a toll upon his life and mind. He hoped for better for his young readers.

i. Morgan, on the last portion of the book, beginning at 11:9: "Its first word, like the first word in the Manifesto of the King in later days, indicates the true thought and desire of God for man: 'Rejoice.'"

ii. This also indicates that in his conclusion, Solomon saw clearly that there was a place in youth (though not only there) in the legitimate pleasures and satisfactions of life. If the meaning of life was not found in the pursuit of pleasure (as in Ecc_2:10-11), it is also not found in asceticism and self-denial for its own sake.

iii. If we accept the truth of the next few lines; that there is more to life than what we can see – that there is an eternity and an eternal God to reckon with – then the legitimate pleasures of life *can* be enjoyed in the best sense.

One doesn't try to find meaning in those pleasures, but simply some good seasoning for a life that finds its meaning in eternity and the eternal God.

iv. "In this frame of mind we can now turn to the delights of life ... not as if they were opiates to tranquillize us, but as invigorating gifts of God." (Kidner)

v. "Rab, a Jewish teacher of the third century a.d., commented, 'Man will have to give account for all that he saw and did not enjoy.'" (Wright)

b. Walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment: Here the Preacher comes to the answer of his premise and his book. One may live according to their heart and by what they see; but they should not think that their own heart or eyes will be their judge. *There is a God in heaven who will bring all your life and works into judgment.*

i. "The statement is brief, for he knew nothing more than the fact, and could add nothing to it." (Deane) ii. Here is the antidote and antithesis of the *under the sun* premise. Life is lived not only for this life but also for eternity, knowing that good will be rewarded and evil will be condemned perfectly by the God who will bring you into judgment. Literally, Solomon spoke of *the* judgment, referring to our great accountability before God.

iii. "His judicial activity is not 'the type of the blindfold maiden holding a balance in her hand' nor 'the cold

neutrality of an impartial judge', but is rather the consuming energy in which God must bring about 'right'."

(Eaton) *This makes everything full of meaning.*

c. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart: Living in light of eternity and the eternal God gives us hope for this life, not only for the life to come. It will remove sorrow from the heart.

i. The Apostle Paul knew this eternal perspective banished sorrow from the heart and later wrote, *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.* (1Co_15:58)

ii. Without this premise of eternity and the eternal God, life is vain and meaningless. The Apostle Paul understood this: *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable* (1Co_15:19).

d. And put away evil from your flesh: Living in light of eternity and the eternal God also is an incentive to live a holy, godly life in our days on earth. We know that our good will be rewarded and blessed; not only in this life, but also in the life to come.

e. For childhood and youth are vanity: In an *under the sun* premise, childhood and youth are all that matter. This isn't true when we live in light of eternity and the eternal God.

2. (Ecc_12:1) The value of remembering God and eternity in youth.

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,

Before the difficult days come,

And the years draw near when you say,

"I have no pleasure in them":

a. Remember now your Creator: The idea of the Creator is important. This is the first mention of God as Creator. It is as if because the Preacher refused to think about the eternal God one would have to stand before in the future, he also refused to think about the God who existed *before* he did and created him. This self-imposed ignorance relieved the

sense of accountability before the Creator, which would be reckoned in the life to come.

i. “*Creator* is a plural form in Hebrew, suggesting greatness of majesty.” (Eaton) b. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth: Solomon knew that youth are often those most likely to discount the reality of eternity and the eternal God. This is natural, but regrettable, in youth – they are often the most difficult to convince that this life is merely a brief prelude to eternity.

i. Adam Clarke suggested several practical and important points to draw from this exhortation, among them: • • You are not your own; you have no right to yourself. God made you; He is your Creator.

- • Remember Him; *consider* that He is your Creator.
- • Remember Him in your youth; do not fail to give God the first and the best.

ii. “The Preacher here exhorts them to remember God betimes, to gather manna in the morning of their lives, to present the first-fruits to God.” (Trapp)

iii. “As in youth all the powers are more active and vigorous, so they are capable of superior enjoyments. *Faith, hope, and love*, will be in their best *tenor*, their greatest *vigour*, and in their *least encumbered state*. And it will be *easier* for you to *believe, hope, pray, love, obey, and bear your cross*, than it can be in old age and decrepitude.”

(Clarke)

c. Before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them”: The Preacher advised young people to remember God and eternity before they suffered greatly by subjecting themselves to an *under the sun* premise and all the meaninglessness associated with it.

3. (Ecc_12:2-5) A poetic description of advancing age.

While the sun and the light,

The moon and the stars,

Are not darkened,

And the clouds do not return after the rain;
In the day when the keepers of the house tremble,
And the strong men bow down;
When the grinders cease because they are few,
And those that look through the windows grow dim;
When the doors are shut in the streets,
And the sound of grinding is low;
When one rises up at the sound of a bird,
And all the daughters of music are brought low.
Also they are afraid of height,
And of terrors in the way;
When the almond tree blossoms,
The grasshopper is a burden,
And desire fails.

For man goes to his eternal home,
And the mourners go about the streets.

a. While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened: Most agree that what follows here is a poetic description of the effects of advancing age.

- • The arms and hands that keep the body now begin to tremble (the keepers of the house tremble) • • The legs and knees begin to sag (the strong men bow down)
- • Teeth are lost and chewing is more difficult (the grinders cease because they are few) • • The eyes are dimmed (the windows grow dim)
- • The ears become weaker and weaker (the sound of grinding is low)
- • Sleep becomes more difficult and one is easily awakened (one rises up at the sound of a bird) • • Singing and music are less appreciated (the daughters of music are brought low) • • One becomes more fearful in life (afraid of height, and of terrors in the way) • • The hair becomes white (the almond tree blossoms)
- • The once active become weak (the grasshopper is a burden)

- The passions and desires of life weaken and wane (desire fails)

- i. Desire fails: "The word rendered 'desire' is found nowhere else in the Old Testament and its meaning is disputed."

- (Deane) Although, Kidner states: "This is the point of the Hebrew expression, 'the caper-berry fails'. This berry was highly regarded as a stimulus to appetite and as an aphrodisiac."

- b. For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets: At the end of man's advancing age is his eternal home – *not* the unknown grave and darkness. The Preacher has now set man's advancing age in connection with eternity, not vanity.

- i. We do well to remember that the Old Testament generally does not state the life and condition of man after this life with great certainty. Yet through his diligent searching, the Preacher has come to the right conclusion – that after this life, man goes to his eternal home as the mourners go about the streets.

- ii. "So this wonderful book closes with the enunciation of a truth found nowhere else so clearly defined in the Old Testament, and thus opens the way to the clearer light shed upon the awful future by the revelation of the gospel."

- (Deane)

- 4. (Ecc_12:6-7) A final plea: Remember God before you go to life beyond the sun.

- Remember your Creator* before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken,

- Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain,

- Or the wheel broken at the well.

- Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,

- And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

- a. Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed: Solomon again pleads with his reader to remember God *before* this life is over, and he repeated a variety of metaphors to describe the ending of this life.

i. "The image points to the value of life (*silver... gold*), and the drama in the end of a life whose pieces cannot be put together again." (Eaton) b. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it: This is *why* it is so important to remember your Creator in this life; because when this life is over, one will answer to the eternal God and to eternity.

B. Conclusion: Eternity and the eternal God make everything matter.

1. (Ecc_12:8) A final analysis of life under the sun.

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,
"All *is* vanity."

a. Vanity of vanities: By way of contrast, the Preacher returned to his starting point (Ecc_1:2). Having examined the meaninglessness of life with an *under the sun* premise (excluding eternity and the eternal God), one *must* say that life is not only meaningless, but the ultimate in meaninglessness (vanity of vanities).

b. All is vanity: With the *under the sun* premise, not only is life meaningless, but all is vanity. *Nothing* has meaning.

i. One man who reflected deeply on the meaning of life – and the price of a life lived without meaning – was a holocaust survivor named Viktor Frankl. His book *Man's Search for Meaning* relates some of his war experiences and understanding of life. He wrote:

ii. "This striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man." "I think the meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected." (Frankl)

iii. "I turn to the detrimental influence of that feeling of which so many patients complain today, namely, the feeling of the total and ultimately meaninglessness of their lives. They lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for.

They are haunted by the experience of their inner emptiness, a void within themselves.... This existential

vacuum manifests itself mainly in a state of boredom.” (Frankl)

iv. Frankl warned of the danger of those who live without meaning: “No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people wish him to do (totalitarianism).”

v. Frankl was not a Christian and didn’t believe there was any one meaning to life. He thought that each man had his own and it could even change from moment to moment. He thought that the meaning of life could be found in three ways. First, by doing a deed. Second, by experiencing a value. Third, by suffering.

2. (Ecc_12:9-10) The Preacher prods us towards true wisdom.

And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out *and* set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and *what was* written *was* upright—words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* wearisome to the flesh.

a. Because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people: The Preacher’s search for knowledge didn’t leave him less wise. He was still a teacher of the people and a writer of proverbs.

b. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well driven nails: The Preacher kept his confidence in the power of words to teach, challenge, and change people. Special confidence was appropriate in those words given by one Shepherd, even if they came through a wise man or a scholar.

i. The Preacher understood how one should proclaim God's truth.

- • He should teach the people knowledge.
- • He should seek to find acceptable words.
- • He should seek to bring forth that which is upright – words of truth.
- • He should make his words as goads and well-driven nails, with point and direction.
- • He should bring forth the words given by one Shepherd.
- • He should realize that good study is wearisome to the flesh and be willing to pay that price.

ii. Goads ... well-driven nails: "Here then are two more qualities that mark the pointed sayings of the wise: they spur the will and stick in the memory." (Kidner)

iii. "He realized that *pleasing words* (lit. 'words of delight') have a penetrating effect that slapdash and ill-considered words lack. Second, his words are written *uprightly*. The two characteristics balance each other. His words are not so *pleasing* that they cease to be *upright*." (Eaton) iv. "This eloquent man took pains that he might be heard with understanding, with obedience." (Trapp) c. Be admonished by these: One should take special care to hear and be admonished by the words of God, given by one Shepherd.

d. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh: The Preacher cautions us to not believe everything we read, for all does not come from the one Shepherd.

i. "We grow addicted to research itself, in love with our own hard questions. An answer would spoil everything." (Kidner)

ii. "Two thousand years have elapsed since this was written; and since that time some millions of treatises have been added, on all kinds of subjects, to those which have gone before. The press is still groaning under and teeming with books, books innumerable; and no one subject is yet

exhausted, notwithstanding all that has been written on it.” (Clarke)

3. (Ecc_12:13-14) Conclusion: live as one preparing for judgment and eternity Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man’s all.

For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing,
Whether good or evil.

a. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: After writing much of the Book of Ecclesiastes from a common but false premise, one that excluded eternal accountability and the God of eternity, now the Preacher concludes, having led us to the conclusion of the whole matter.

b. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all: Solomon came to understand that it *was* worth it to obey God, and this obedience both pleased God and fulfilled man’s destiny.

i. “*Fear God* is a call that puts us in our place, and all other fears, hopes, and admirations in their place.” (Kidner) ii. “From that to this should be every man’s pilgrimage in this world. We begin at vanity, and never know perfectly that we are vain till we come to fear God and keep his commandments.” (Trapp) iii. “If it is the ‘beginning of wisdom’ it is also *the end*, the conclusion; no progress in the believer’s life leaves it behind.” (Eaton) iv. “This is the only place in Ecclesiastes where the *commands* of God are mentioned.” (Eaton) v. The King James Version (and other translations as well) inserted an unhelpful word in Ecc_12:13, translating *For this is the whole duty of man*. The word *duty* does not appear in the Hebrew text, and it has much more the idea of for this is man’s all.

vi. “The last phrase reads literally: ‘For this is the whole of the man.’ Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, however, the ‘whole of the man’ is a Hebrew idiom for ‘every man’ (cf Ecc_3:13;

Ecc_5:19). The sense, therefore, is ‘This applies to everyone’.” (Eaton)

c. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil: This is impossible to say with an *under the sun* premise; yet it is the root reason why it is wise and good for man to fear God and keep His commandments.

i. There is, and will be, and eternal accounting for everything we do. This is the complete opposite of believing that all is vanity or meaningless; it means that *everything* has meaning and importance, both for the present and for eternity. “If God cares as much as this, nothing can be pointless.” (Kidner)

ii. Through this book the Preacher carefully thought through (and lived through) a premise commonly held: of life lived without consideration of eternity and the eternal God. After all that, he comes to this conclusion – and challenges all those who continue holding to the premise he held through most all the book. “What would it be like, asks the Preacher, if things were utterly different from what you thought? What if this world is not the ultimate one? What if God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him?” (Eaton)

iii. As Paul explained, this puts life into perspective: *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.* (2Co_4:17 to 2Co_5:2)

iv. “This is how the book will end. On this rock we can be destroyed; but it is rock, not quicksand. There is the chance to build.” (Kidner)

v. In the 1930s an Australian alcoholic named Arthur Stace was converted and heard an inspiring sermon on the subject of *eternity*. The preacher said, "I wish I could shout ETERNITY through all the streets of Sydney!" Stace was so moved that as he left the church he felt an immediate urge to write the word *Eternity*; he had a piece of chalk in his pocket and bent down and wrote on the pavement. Stace was hardly literate and could barely write his own name legibly; but when he wrote *Eternity*, he did so in elegant copperplate style script, usually about 2 feet wide on the pavement. He spent the rest of his life – until 1967 – waking each day at about 5:30, praying for an hour or so, then going around Sydney where he felt God led him to write *Eternity* all over the city. Solomon would have approved of both Arthur Stace and his message: *Eternity*.
(Ecc 11:10) Banish²⁹ emotional stress³⁰ from your mind.³¹

and put away pain³² from your body;³³

for youth³⁴ and the prime of life³⁵ are fleeting.³⁶

(Ecc 12:1) ***Fear God Now Because Old Age and Death Come Quickly***

So remember¹ your Creator in the days of your youth —

before² the difficult³ days come,

and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them";

(Ecc 12:2) before the sun and the light⁴ of the moon and the stars grow dark,

and the clouds disappear⁵ after the rain;

(Ecc 12:3) when those who keep watch over the house⁶
begin to tremble,⁷

and the virile men begin to stoop over,⁸

and the grinders⁹ begin to cease because they grow few,

and those who look through the windows grow dim,¹⁰
(Ecc 12:4) and the doors along the street are shut;

when the sound of the grinding mill¹¹ grows low,

and one is awakened¹² by the sound of a bird,

and all their¹³ songs¹⁴ grow faint,¹⁵
(Ecc 12:5) and they are afraid of heights and the dangers¹⁶
in the street;
the almond blossoms¹⁷ grow white,¹⁸

and the grasshopper¹⁹ drags itself along,²⁰

and the caper berry²¹ shrivels up²² —

because man goes to his eternal home,²³

and the mourners go about in the streets —
(Ecc 12:6) before the silver cord is removed,

or the golden bowl is broken,

or the pitcher is shattered at the well,²⁴

or the water wheel²⁵ is broken at the cistern —
(Ecc 12:7) and the dust returns to the earth as it was,

and the life's breath²⁶ returns to God who gave it.
(Ecc 12:8) **Concluding Refrain: Qoheleth Restates His Thesis**

"Absolutely futile!"²⁷ laments the Teacher,²⁸

"All of these things²⁹ are futile!"³⁰
(Ecc 12:9) **Concluding Epilogue: Qoheleth's Advice is Wise**

Not only was the Teacher wise,³¹

but he also taught knowledge to the people;

he carefully evaluated³² and arranged³³ many proverbs.
(Ecc 12:10) The Teacher sought to find delightful³⁴ words,

and to write³⁵ accurately truthful sayings.³⁶
(Ecc 12:11) The words of the sages are like prods,³⁷

and the collected sayings are like firmly fixed nails;

they are given by one shepherd.
(Ecc 12:12) **Concluding Exhortation: Fear God and Obey His Commands!**

Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.³⁸

There is no end to the making³⁹ of many books,

and much study is exhausting to the body.⁴⁰
(Ecc 12:13) Having heard everything, I have reached this
conclusion:⁴¹

Fear God and keep his commandments,

because this is the whole duty⁴² of man.
(Ecc 12:14) For God will evaluate every deed,⁴³

including every secret thing, whether good or evil.